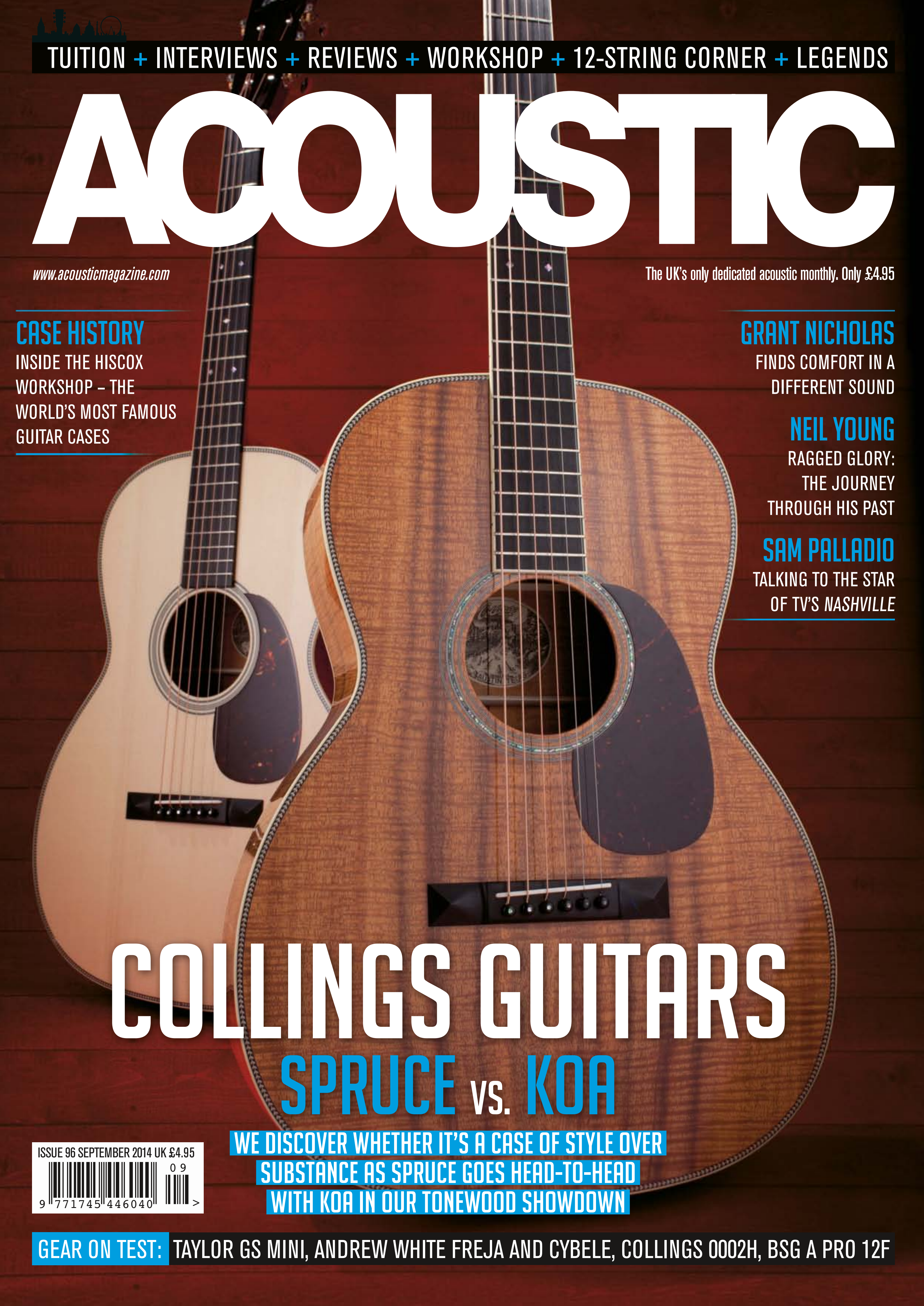

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TALKING TO THE STAR OF TV'S *NASHVILLE*

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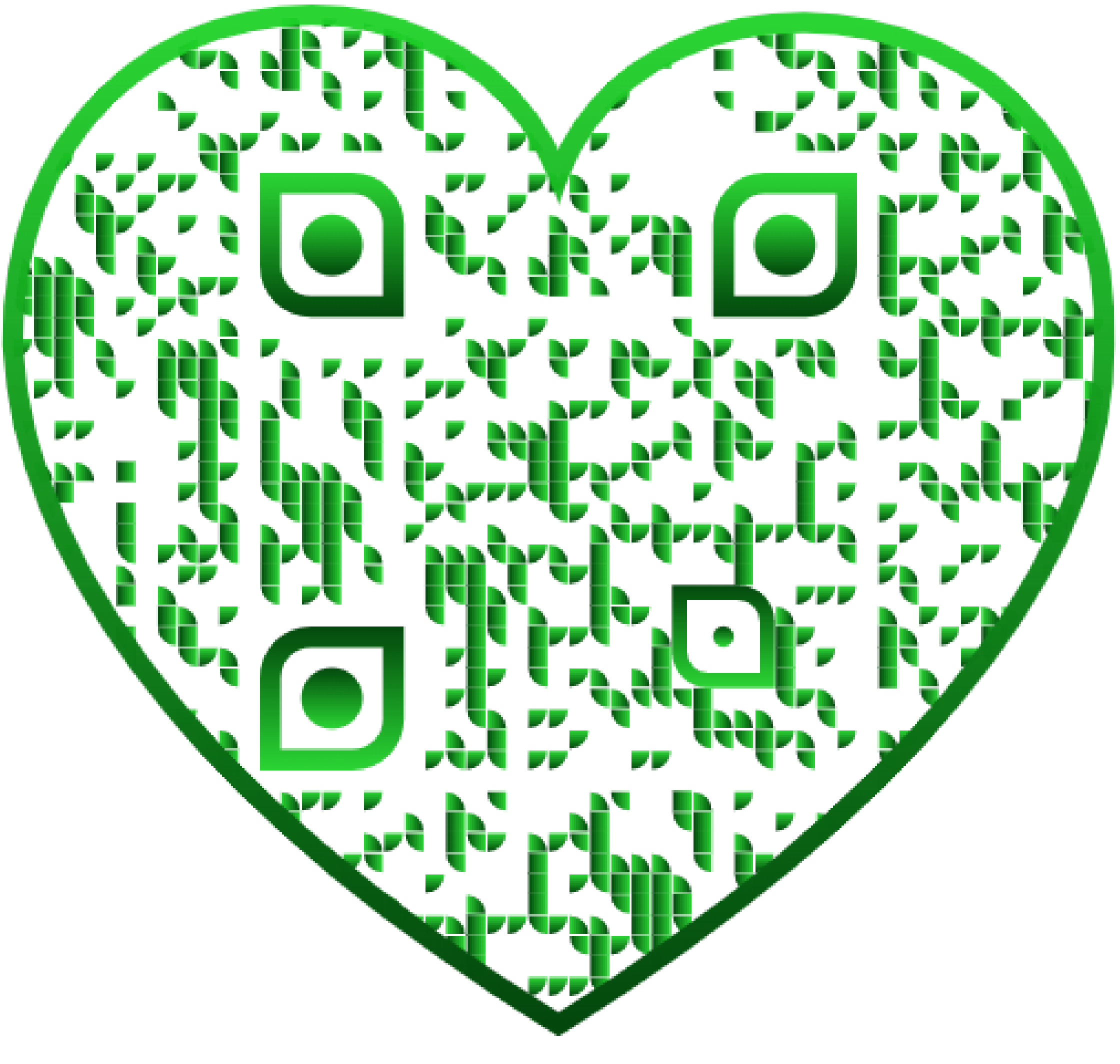
GEAR ON TEST: TAYLOR GS MINI, ANDREW WHITE FREJA AND CYBELE, COLLINGS 0002H, BSG A PRO 12F



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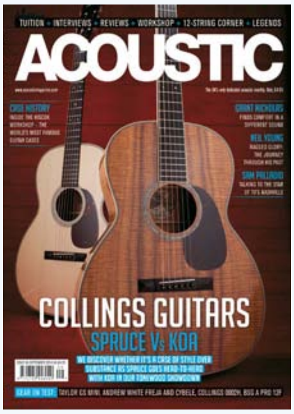

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A LITTLE WORD

Okay, so when you think of Texas you might come top trumps with NASA, but head to its capital, Austin, and Texas becomes much more than the search for E.T. – Austin is home to this month's cover stars – Collings Guitars. There's no doubt about it – Collings instruments are breathtaking. Meticulous precision abounds in every angle, edge, and detail, and there really are few other makes comparable to the genius of Bill Collings' US dream team.

Here at *Acoustic* magazine, we get a lot of questions along the lines of, "So what's the difference between this guitar and that guitar" and aside from construction methods and techniques which will effect the guitar's voice, the woods used in its construction is the main factor in deciding the tone of a guitar. Although, don't get me wrong, if you played a Martin and a Taylor with the same woods and body size, the sound you got would be a million miles apart. Anyway, this is where our two identically sized Collings guitars – albeit with different tonewoods – come into play. People often see spruce guitars for £2k and then a koa guitar for £3k and ask why this is. However you phrase the question, the answer is always the same: wood.

It should come as no surprise then that Collings Guitars has their own dedicated wood specialist – Bruce Van Wart – to hand select each piece of timber used in their guitars. These two 0002H models are no different. Van Wart, along with renowned high-end guitar specialists Dave Mann Music, chose the woods to be used in these models. In a style-over-substance war, we put the koa-topped Collings and the spruce-topped Collings head-to-head in an eye wateringly expensive (£11k) tonewood battle. So, for everyone who's been asking for the tonal differences between koa and spruce – get our take over on page 46. Tonewoods aside, these guitars are the epitome of high-end US luthiery and I imagine a lot of you will be using eBay to sell every single one of your guitars to accumulate enough capital to get your hands on a Collings as soon as you've finished reading this issue! You'd better be quick, though – these two models are completely unique and are the only two in existence.

Elsewhere in this issue we chat to Sam Palladio – star of the hit musical TV show *Nashville*. What I love about this show is that each cast member isn't just a great actor, but a tremendous musician. Aside from voicing a character for the next big Disney animation, Sam's been busy penning his own music. We chatted to him at the Gibson HQ in Soho about writing music on the set of *Nashville* and why he calls the Grand Ole Opry his second home.

Guy Little
Editor

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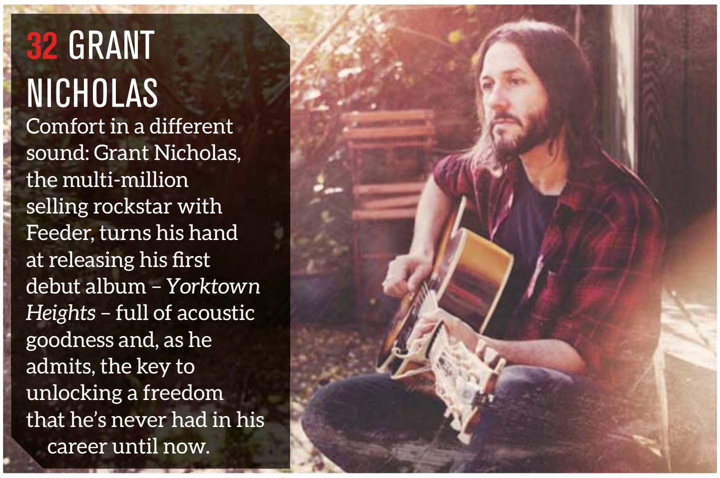
Swapping the Cornish countryside for Tennessee, Sam Palladio has made his name starring in TV's *Nashville*, in *Runner Runner* alongside Justin Timberlake, and with Matt LeBlanc in *Episodes* – but his sights are also set on his own music. We chat to him about buying guitars in Music City, writing music on the set of *Nashville*, and having the Grand Ole Opry as a second home.

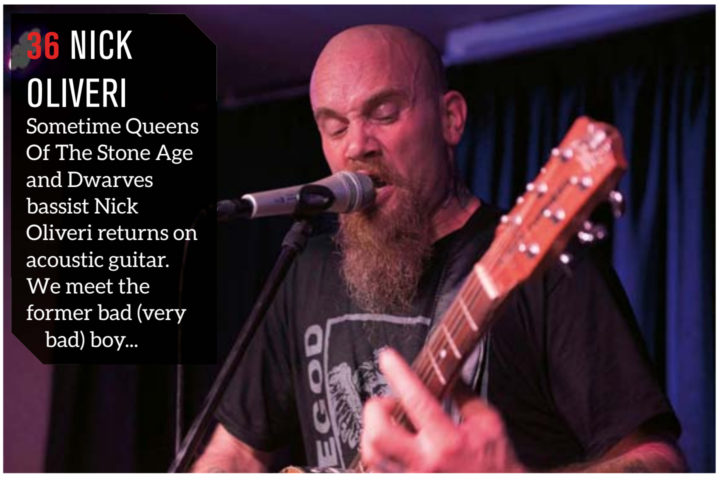
RETUNE YOUR EARS

10 Listen to something new, with Paul Strange



32 GRANT NICHOLAS

Comfort in a different sound: Grant Nicholas, the multi-million selling rockstar with Feeder, turns his hand at releasing his first debut album – *Yorktown Heights* – full of acoustic goodness and, as he admits, the key to unlocking a freedom that he's never had in his career until now.



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24 HOLLY WILLIAMS

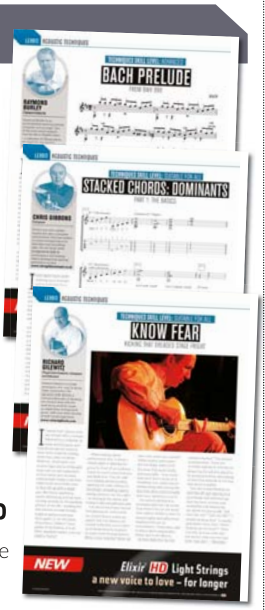
Although her grandad modernised country music, Americana singer-songwriter Holly Williams gets no love from the elitist country music radio in the USA. Country radio be damned, though, as Holly has released her third and finest album *The Highway* to both a loyal and burgeoning fan base beyond Nashville.

GUITAR TECHNIQUES

Improve your playing with our techniques section...

With 12 pages of different level-specific techniques, whether you're a novice or an expert our columns have something for everyone.

THE EXPERTS



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Case makers are often the unsung heroes of the acoustic guitar marketplace, even though they are the people who take considerable pains to protect our most valuable music assets. One notable British success story is that of Hiscox Cases and we thought it was high time to tell their story...

70 THE WORKSHOP: RALPH BOWN
What does Martin Simpson, John Renbourn, Clive Carroll and Brendan Crocker all have in common? Other than being darn fine acoustic guitars players, that is... They all play Ralph Bown guitars – that's what.

86 IN THE LOOP
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GEAR REVIEWS

Acoustic keeps you up to date with what's hot and what's not in our gear reviews section.

46 COLLINGS 0002H KOA & 0002H SPRUCE
This pair of Collings – 0002H koa & 0002H spruce – rendered reviewer David Mead practically speechless, but at least we know what he wants for Christmas this year!

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It's a looker for sure, but will this shallow-bodied acoustic have the tone to compete at this level? Alun Lower finds out...

56 TAYLOR GS MINI
Take a fully sized Taylor Grand Symphony, shrink it down to munchkin size and what have you got? David Mead is on a mission to find out...

62 ANDREW WHITE
Custom guitar titan The North American Guitar takes on another range of Far East-made acoustics with a luthier-built mentality. Guy Little meets two Andrew White production models with two very different players in mind...

NEWS DESK

ACOUSTIC BRINGS YOU ALL OF THE LATEST PRODUCTS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF ACOUSTIC MUSIC.

NEWTON FAULKNER ADDED TO LONDON ACOUSTIC GUITAR SHOW LINE-UP

Virtuoso songwriter will host a masterclass on Sunday 14 September 2014

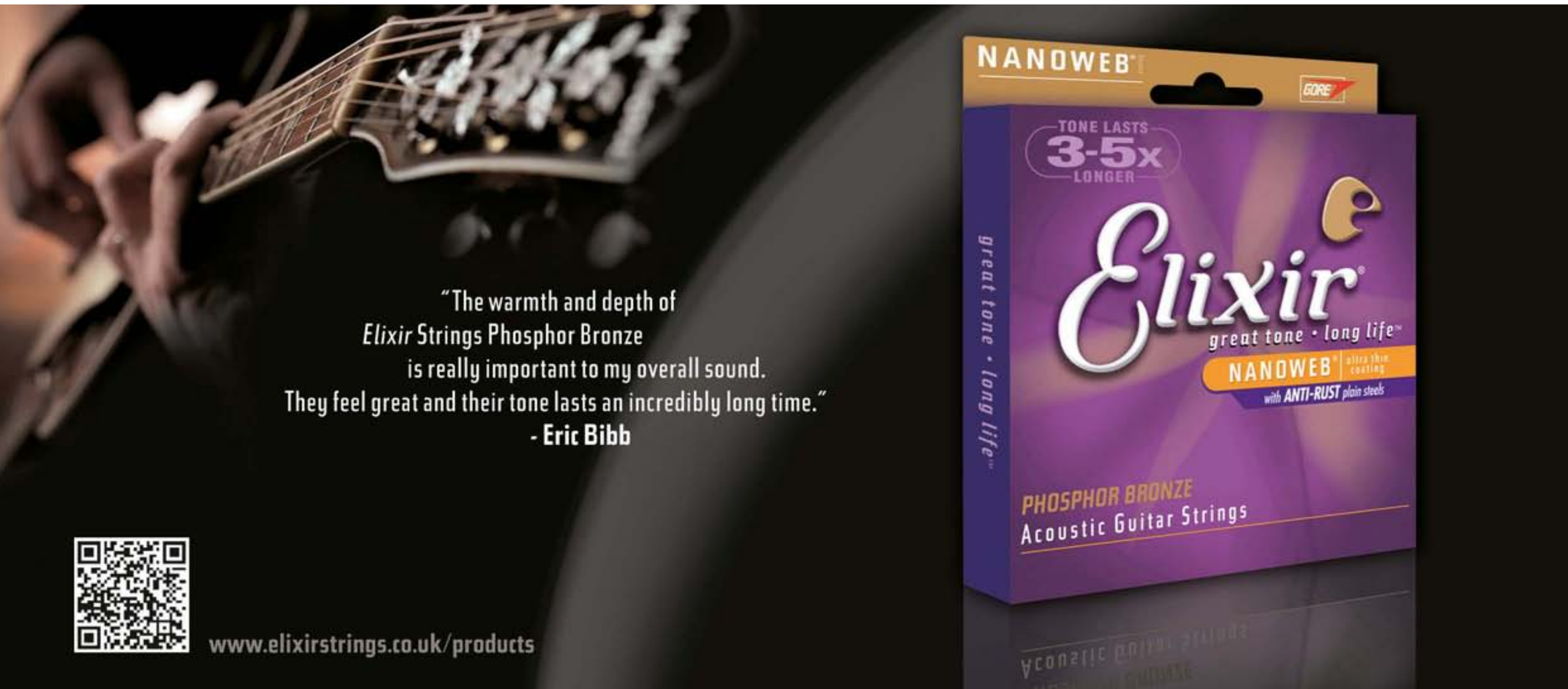
Newton Faulkner will bring his exemplary blend of percussive fingerstyle guitar to the London Acoustic Guitar Show 2014. The multi-platinum selling songwriter will host an intimate masterclass for show visitors on Sunday 14 September at London's Olympia center.

Newton Faulkner knows all about invention. When he emerged in 2007 he was the fleet-fingered prince of sparkling guitar pop. A graduate of Guildford Academy of Contemporary Music, the then 22-year-old kid from Surrey had a million-selling, number one hit with his debut album *Hand Built By Robots*. 2009's *Rebuilt By Humans* was another joyous burst of sparkle-pop which hit number three on the UK album chart. After invention, innovation, reinvention and creation, came Newtown Faulkner's third album, *Write It On Your Skin* – an album that returned him to the number one spot.

The Eric Roche-taught songwriter took a new approach to making an album the fourth time round, turning his home into the virtual musical Big Brother house for five solid weeks, as he opened up the making of the album *Studio Zoo* to everyone, everywhere. Fans could log in online and follow every detail of the ups, downs, dramas and laughs including guest appearances from Mumford & Sons' Ted Dwayne, India Bourne, Nick Harper, and Thomas Leeb. Newton is currently in the studio writing his next album.

Newton joins the Manic Street Preachers' James Dean Bradfield, Nile Rodgers, Glenn Tilbrook and Chris Difford of Squeeze, Gabrielle Aplin, Lewis Watson, Tony McManus, Jon Gomm and many more over 13-14 September 2014 for the UK's biggest and best guitar event.

To book your tickets, visit: ***www.londonacousticguitarshow.com***



D'ADDARIO ADDS TO ITS CLASSICAL STRINGS RANGE

New Pro-Arte Carbon strings

D'Addario has added to its string range with two new Pro-Arte Carbon Classical sets for classical guitar.

The new EJ45FF Normal Tension and EJ46FF Hard Tension strings are engineered to deliver superior tone with powerful sustain in both live performance and studio settings.

Featuring D'Addario's fluorocarbon trebles for enhanced intonation and responsive attack, the new strings also boast the firm's Dynacore basses, which, constructed using its exclusive multifilament core material, aims to offer a rich tone with optimised tuning stability and string life.

'Modern concert guitarists are devout, scrupulous, and diligent craftsmen and women, who expect the highest level of quality and consistency,' commented Brandon Medici, fretted product specialist. 'Designed to the exacting specifications of our Pro-Arte nylon trebles, our carbon strings deliver unmatched superior intonation from set to set and provide players with the quality that they have come to expect from D'Addario. Discerning players will also appreciate the quality of intonation and reliable consistency from set to set.' Both sets will retail for £19.49.

For more info, visit the website:
www.daddario.com

SELECTRON DISTRIBUTION SIGNS DEAL TO BRING GUILD GUITARS BACK TO UK PLAYERS

The distributor also takes on a range of Cordoba classical guitars and ukes

UK Distributor Selectron has secured a deal to bring Guild Guitars back to the UK as well as taking on the distribution of the Cordoba classical guitars and ukulele models.

Following the sale of the Guild guitars brand to USA acoustic guitar specialist Cordoba Music Group earlier this year, the UK has been without an official distributor. Selectron has signed with Cordoba to pick up the mantle and to distribute Guild products to the UK.

Selectron CEO Stuart Brown stated: 'We are very proud and honoured to be given the opportunity to distribute a heritage brand such as Guild. With its distinguished history of crafting the world's finest acoustic guitars, Selectron is truly delighted to help grow the line in the UK and to be part of that history.'

Initially, the Traditional Series acoustics, GAD Series acoustics and the Newark St. collection will be available immediately.

Selectron will also be introducing the Cordoba line of classical and ukulele instruments to the UK.

Already hugely popular in the USA and Europe, Cordoba classical guitars came out of the need to build an affordable, well made, lightweight and handmade guitar without being very high priced.

For more info on Guild, visit:
www.selectron-uk.co.uk

GRETSCH GUITARS ANNOUNCES NEW JIM DANDY FLAT TOP

US guitar company also updates their resonator lineup in the Roots Series

The limited release Bronze Burst Jim Dandy Flat Top embodies everything that was great about everyone's first guitar. Made of select guitar woods and fully lined and braced, the G9520 comes hot off the heels of the G9500 Jim Dandy flat top.

Gretsch Guitars has also updated their resonator line up from the Roots Series with the limited-release G9202 Honey Dipper Special. This round-neck resonator guitar has all the same features as the G9201 Honey Dipper, with the additions of aged white fingerboard binding, screened headstock graphic and a weathered "Cactus Flower" finish. The vital feature of all Gretsch resonator guitars is the Gretsch "Ampli-Sonic" resonator cone. Hand-spun in Eastern Europe, the Ampli-Sonic diaphragm yields more volume and tone.

The combination of a metal body, biscuit cone and square neck comes alive with the arrival of the limited release G9212 Honey Dipper Special. This resonator guitar has all the same features as the G9201 Honey Dipper round-neck model but boasts a square neck.

For more info on these new instruments, visit:
www.gretschguitars.com

RETUNE YOUR EARS

Presenting new, interesting or alternative musicians. Listen to something different.
With Paul Strange

ANNIE EVE
STYLE... (SINGER-SONGWRITER)

As a kid, I felt I was watching life rather than participating in it. Consequently my thought process is a little askew. I see my music as an extension of myself, reflective of my own mind, and growth. The sound is heavy in atmosphere, with a focus on lyrics. My debut album, *Sunday '91*, is out now. The title refers to the day and year I was born. I like it because it's vague, while meaning something obvious to me. My favourite track is 'Animal'. It has colour and builds subtly while never losing control. I use my acoustic to write most of my material. Anxiety, attraction and isolation inspire me. My acoustic is a Martin 000-15M. It's my sidekick, small, smooth with a dark resonance to it. It's one of those guitars that grows with you. My electric is a sonic-blue Cobain signature Fender Mustang. I use a Tanglewood acoustic amp, and a Fender Blues Junior electric amp. I use an Electro-Harmonix Memory Boy pedal, a line splitter to switch between amps, and a trusty Boss tuner. Initially my older brother taught me guitar. This left me capable of self-growth. I practice weekly with the band and a lot on my own, fingerstyle all the way. There are so many techniques you miss out on if you use a pick. We're working on the live show – I have a UK tour planned for late 2014 – and I'm working on new material. Influences? Old folk music, because it sounds earthy and rough. I like Robert Johnson, Jimmy Page, Jack Steadman and the way Bob Dylan plays guitar. There's so much room to make an acoustic guitar speak. You don't have to be the best technical player to say something with it.
www.annieeve.com

ALEX KUMAR
STYLE... (SINGER-SONGWRITER)

People label my music "folk", "blues", or even "country". I came from the roots, but I play to get the point across. My debut album is me and my guitar playing songs about death, sorrow and lost love. '1963' is an inter-generational thing. On the surface it's cultural, but really it's political. You look back and see so much hope – but they shot JFK. Lots of things changed, but, 50 years on, things still need changing. 'Love (Or The Next Best Thing)' is my favourite track and probably the best song I've written so far. Three songs are "traditionals" – 'St. James Infirmary Blues', 'Long Time Man', and 'Pretty Peggy-O', a love story as old as love itself. I used my Guild F-20 blonde spruce top with mahogany sides on the recording. I got it as an acoustic, but Mansons in Exeter fitted a Fishman pickup. Now that I'm doing bigger concerts, I'm using my Martin because it's sonically stronger. It took months to find the right one because my Guild's been so good to me. I write my songs quickly. If it isn't there within an hour, it's not going to come. I'm self-taught. I use my fingers so I can play fingerstyle and play solos while playing rhythm. If I strum, I use my fingernails like flamenco guitarists. Acoustic guitar heroes? Django Reinhardt and Lonnie Johnson. Influences? Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, Johnny Cash. I'm 18 now. As my reputation grows, my age is less of an issue, but I've dealt with plenty of venues and promoters who've seen a young musician and thought they could walk over them. I've come out on top. Future plans? Writing and playing gigs around the south west.
www.alexkumar.co.uk

JASON TITLEY
STYLE... (SONGWRITER)

For the past 20 years I've written songs and stored them in the "to do" drawer. With a break from my current band, I thought this would be the perfect time to bring out a solo project. *Still Rollin'* features guest musicians, including Rob Ickes and Tim O'Brien. Musically, it's bluegrass meets Americana and jazz. It was recorded remotely so the other players added their parts in their own studios. I like 'Fluff And Chuff' because it exceeded how I thought it would sound and also 'Ticking The Boxes' because it's to my wife. My workhorse guitar is a 2004 Collings D1, with mahogany body and Sitka spruce top. A true "banjo killer", it's fitted with a K&K Pure Trinity System, which I plug into a Fishman Pocket Blender. From there I go into a Boss TU-3 tuner, then to a Boss GE-7 for stepping solos and finally into an Orchid Micro DI box. I ramp up my practising before tours or big gigs because you have to build up the stamina you need for the bluegrass speeds. I'm self-taught, and also play double bass and mandolin. My guitar style is rhythmic because I was a drummer growing up. My dad – Bill Titley – would use me in his bands. We were always getting in trouble with venues because I was underage, but once it became apparent that there would be no band unless they let me play, they turned a blind eye. Influences? Clarence White, Tony Rice and more recently players like Grant Gordy. We have a south west tour coming up in November and hopefully some festivals for next year. The significance of the boy on the front cover of my album? That's me in Bushy Park, London, 1974.
www.jasontitley.com

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DIVERSIFYING YOUR PORTFOLIO

In the current market, artists have to make up for shortfalls in CD and download sales with income sourced elsewhere. But all is not lost. Even highly successful artists do not make their living 100 per cent from performing music. With a little imagination and savvy it is possible to come up with ingenious ways to boost your income using your musical talents.

Research

It's a good idea to spend a little time brainstorming ideas. What are you good at? What skills do you have? What's your USP? Matt Wanstall, MU regional officer for the North of England, suggests considering the obvious first: trying different types of performance or unusual combinations of skills.

'Even as a performer, there may be a lot of different things a musician can do. Someone may have their own artistic project, but they may be able to play in a covers or functions band as well.'

'Some musicians might write or arrange for other people,' Wanstall continues. 'They may have a studio, so as well as recording their own material, they could record other bands or do sessions online remotely for other artists, for instance. DJing is another option – parties and weddings can be lucrative.'

Research can help locate gaps in music-related enterprises in your area. For example, if you are a singer who is good with children, you may want to try running a music group for toddlers or primary school children. You could even run a course for adults, or a seniors' choir that takes place during the day for retired people. Music therapy is another option.

Teaching

Musicians at all career levels enjoy sharing their knowledge with others, children or adults. It can be rewarding and enlightening for the tutor as well as the student.

'Teaching is something that two-thirds of our members have in their portfolio – whether they've arrived at it via a formal route, or they give private lessons,' says Bindu Paul, MU education and equalities official. 'We provide bespoke advice on professional development at any stage in your teaching career.

If you are thinking of teaching, check out musicteachers.co.uk/artofteaching for best practice guides and ideas for the classroom.

MU members get access to a range of career development advice. If you're considering a change, contact your regional office and book a one-to-one with your MU official. For general advice and more information about how to join the Union, please visit ***theMU.org***

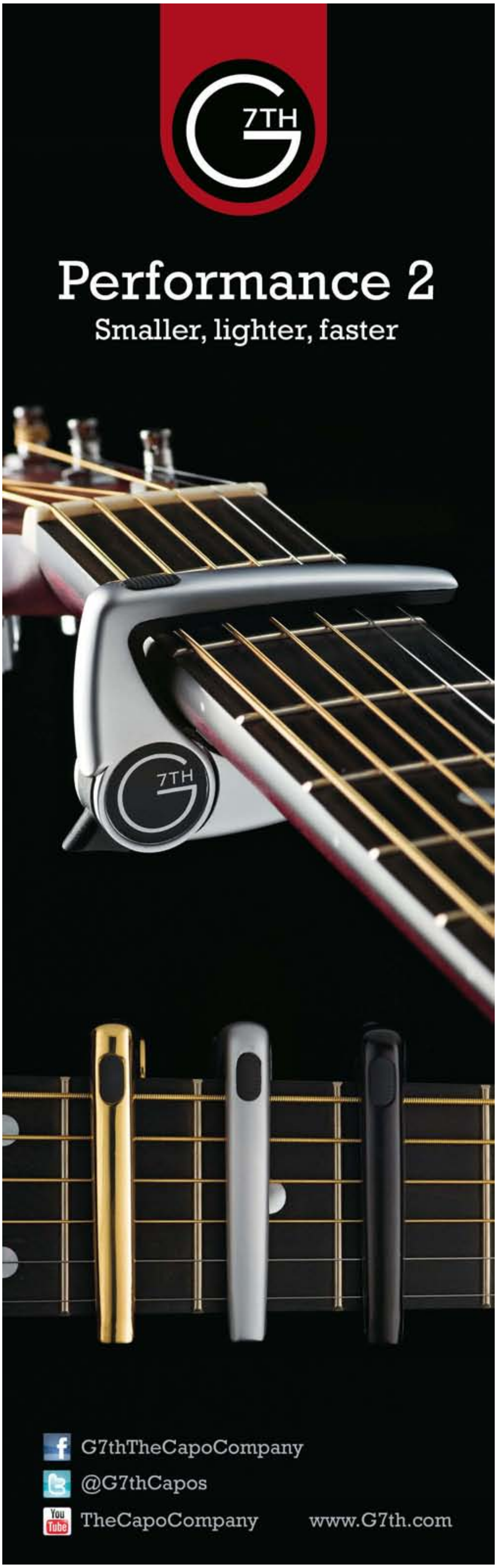


IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

Summer 14 NAMM®

WORDS: JAMIE BLAINE

Acoustic reports from across the pond as the Summer NAMM show gets underway in Nashville, Tennessee.

IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

A load of new Taylors were on show to celebrate the company's 40th anniversary

It's July in Nashville and time for the 2014 summer edition of the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) trade show located in the sixteen acre, 2 million square foot wood and steel enormodome known as the Music City Center. Stepping onto the escalator, we can't help but notice that suitably enough, it's as if Summer NAMM is being held inside a giant acoustic guitar.

First up we hit the Taylor Guitars booth. Well, it's not really a booth. More like Taylor's living room. Opting out of the showroom floor, Taylor wisely chose a separate space to themselves this year. Dimly lit with guitar-lined walls, it makes for a far more intimate display and helps to appreciate the quality of their instruments without a legion of ukeleles and baritone saxes blaring all around. Quite nice, really.

Taylor's Keith Brawley shows off a Fall Limited 500 series in Tasmanian Blackwood. Testing the Taz Black, we find a lack of natural compression in the wood offers a pleasant surprise. The harder we hit, the louder the guitar gets and it just doesn't stop getting louder. The Fall 500 is one rockin' guitar.

Also new for 2014 are the redesigned 800s in celebration of Taylor's 40th anniversary. Fluid action, rich texture. Plugged in, the 800 is immediately accessible thanks to the Expression System 2 pickup. Pretty much any Taylor we grab sounds crisp, offering precision electronics that will excel in live settings while providing a tonal balance for the studio that can't be beat.

We see a lot of Taylor Minis on the streets of Nashville and the new GS mini with Rosewood back and sides, solid Sitka top and an ES-T pickup is a great addition to the line. In spite of its size, it doesn't have a small sound or feel and would be a nice fit for any level or style, whether a beginner or 40 year vet. If we were singing on the Nashville streets this morning, the Taylor Mini would be the way to go.

The T5z smaller body electric-acoustic hybrid gets the prize for the most immediately addictive guitar we'll play all day. With a thinner body than its predecessor, its curves fit perfectly tight against our side. Light as a dream, it plays like one too. Some guitars

UK luthier Patrick James Eggle, who heads up the design of Faith Guitars (pictured with a Patrick James Eggle acousic)

Taylor Guitars exhibiting one of its T5z acoustic-electric models in Nashville

just plain feel good. The T5z hits the sweet spot in acoustic sound with electric feel and quite honestly, we're wondering if we can sneak the Gaslamp Black Model into our swag bag and out the door. In the interest of journalistic integrity, we should probably take this one home for further review. Lingering in the the Taylor room a little longer than we should, truth is, we just don't want to give it up.

After failing to sneak the T5z into our bag, we head upstairs to the main showroom floor. First through the door is the C.F. Martin & Co. booth where Chris Martin IV himself shows us the new Signature Edition Louvin Brothers 'Satan is Real' D-28 featuring the graphic from the duo's fabled LP cover splashed across the front. Production is limited to fifty and the price is set at $4,666 (US).

'For six-six-six?' we kid. 'Is that some sort of Satan joke?'

'Devil folklore has always intrigued me and this is my 55th birthday guitar,' Chris Martin tell us. 'The Louvin Brothers have an incredibly interesting musical legacy and we thought it would make a great addition to our line.'

With only 50 in existence we handle the Louvin D-28 with extra care, noting the spruce top and Guatemalan Rosewood back and sides. The pearl diamond inlays are a nice touch as is the cocobolo back wedge. Chris goes on to tell us there's a Fishman Aura pickup inside. 'We knew Charlie Louvin in the years before his passing so it only feels fitting to shoulder his namesake edition and pick out a rousing 'Great Atomic Power' in his honor,' he says.

In other Custom and Limited Edition news there's the Navaojoa 25th Anniversary model which features a newly designed scalloped X bracing pattern, solid sapele back and sides, a modified oval neck made of solid sipo and a solid East Indian rosewood fingerboard. How does it sound, you ask? Solid. And solidly limited to 250 guitars.

The D-18 Sycamore, in celebration of 50 years at the Sycamore Street location, is restricted to a run of 50 and coming in at an ultra-limited production quantity of only 25 guitars, Martin's SS-OM42-14 model is almost too beautiful to hold. Almost. Adirondack top, Sinker Mahogany back and sides. Polished finish with an oak toner burst. Paua pearl top inlay with Abalone bordered in mother-of-pearl for the headplate, fingerboard and bridge. On some Martin guitars, it's a revelation just to strum a G. Really, that's all you need. One clean chord. Best sneak it back in the rack before someone sees.

For the common picker with limited funds (like us), C.F. Martin & Co. offers the black on black X Series OM-14 and Dreadnought-14 models. With a modified 30s-style bridge and slick stratabond neck, both models come in at around £400 and feature action so clean and easy we break free of the simple G and hit a few runs higher up on the fretboard.

'We've focused on making a Martin more playable,' Chris Martin reports. 'It wasn't that long ago people would say that a Martin might sound great but it's a challenge to play beyond the third fret. It took us a while – because we don't have an adjustable neck – but playability is no longer an issue. Also, electronics have progressed to the point where you can now plug in and it still sounds like a fine, handmade guitar.'

It's quite the pleasant surprise to round a corner and see our old friends from Faith Guitars in a brilliant white booth that aptly symbolise their reputation for brilliant tones and clean action. They've brought their full line, including the award winning Venus Naked, voted "UK's Best Acoustic" and the popular Mercury Scoop Parlour guitar inspired by Nashville's own Beth Nielsen Chapman.

Spotting our media badges and Union Jack tees, head luthier Patrick James Eggle and brand director Alex Mew rush over to say hello.

'We've never been to America before,' Mew says, 'but we're here and we want to make our presence known. That's the big news for Faith Guitars this year.'

We give their nifty little Mercury Scoop a go. The addition of a simple scooped-section at the 12th fret is a nice touch, providing access to the upper fretboard without sacrificing the tonal depth that a cutaway would bring.

'Parlour guitars are selling big,' Eggle adds. 'Folk is huge right now, y'know.'

The Neptune Cutaway was also a standout with a sweet, woody

tone thanks to an all-mahogany construction. There's something about a mahogany guitar that simply looks divine. Handshakes and congrats all around to Faith on making a welcome stateside splash.

Lunchtime is upon us in Music City and walking down Nashville's legendary neon-lit Lower Broad we witness an amazing display through the front window of the infamous Tootsie's Orchid Lounge. There's a skinny cowboy standing on the side of an ancient Gibson upright, slapping that big acoustic bass like the strings were on fire. Just as we stop to gawk, some honky-tonk hero in a lime-green Nudie-suit leaps up onto the other side of the upright and flatpicks a furious break on a fat Hummingbird so old the flowers are faded and the finish is eaten away at the soundhole.

We stand there in the Tootsie's window with jaws dropped, realising after a while that the bar is half-empty and it's only half past noon. A barmaid wipes the counter and through the open backdoor we can see the mother church of country music – the Ryman auditorium. Hank Sr. himself used to slip through that alley for a few shots of whiskey between Opry shows. The lime-green picker jumps down to sing the second verse while the bassist lays his big Gibson sideways and straddles it hard. Two blocks down, a teenage street busker with Sid Vicious hair squawks out Ed Sheeran's 'Sing' accompanying herself on – you guessed it – a Taylor Mini. Truly, Nashville is Music City.

Lower Broad barbeque and the sight of old Hummingbirds make us eager to visit the Gibson Guitar booth and we finally locate it near the middle of the arena floor. Gibson has a smaller presence at this summer's show but we're excited to see two new limited editions on display, including a stunning SJ-200 Vine. Gold Grover tuners, crown inlays and custom abalone. Our favorite acoustic ever was a 70s J-200 that was sadly lost to a fire. This one is limited to 40 pieces so we better take the chance while we've got it. Know what sounds good on a Gibson J-200? Everything. The Vine is one gorgeous guitar with a rich, sparkling tone.

Chris Martin IV of C.F. Martin & Co. with the new Louvin Brothers D-28 – only 50 exist!

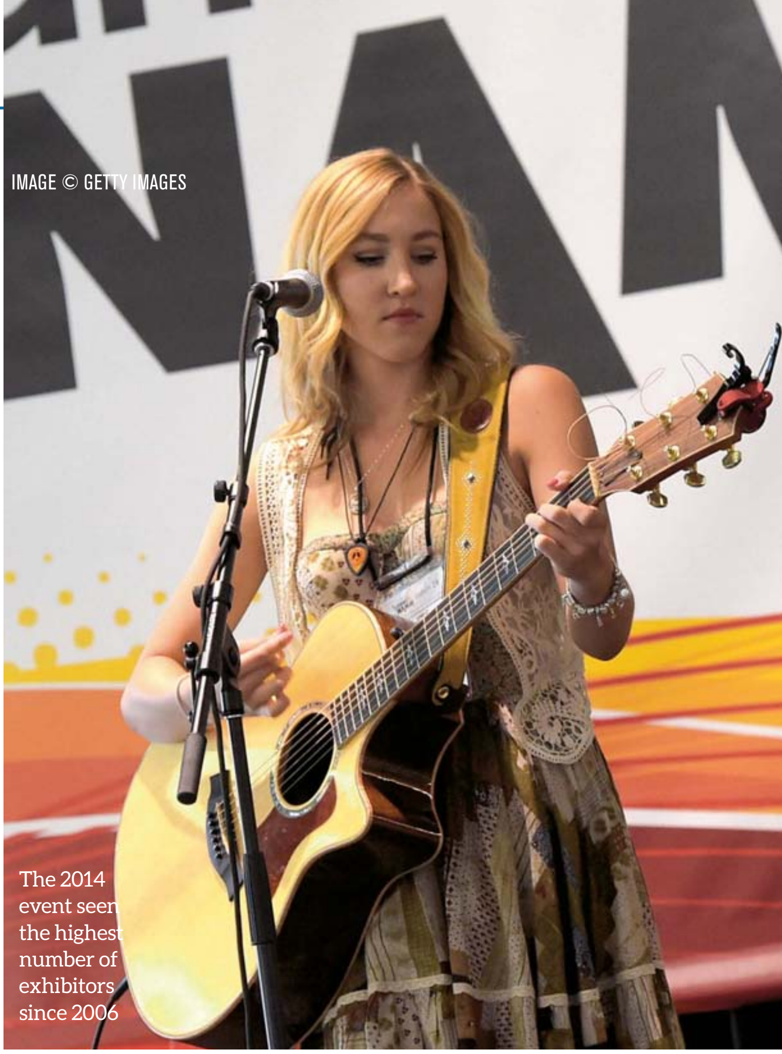


IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES
The 2014 event seen the highest number of exhibitors since 2006

Also on tap for 2014 is a great-looking sunburst J-45. The SJ-200 steals the show this year but both are a joy and privilege to play, each solid as stone and faithfully delivering the classic Gibson sound.

Interesting trivia from Gibson's Ken McMahan: 'Know why it's called the J-200? Because in the 1940s it originally cost 200 dollars. The J-45 was the workhorse at 45 bucks. Back then they were just basic cowboy guitars.'

In a flash we tip our hats, shove $245 dollars in McMahan's hand and grab both guitars. 'Nice try,' he laughs.

At the Yamaha booth we meet with product manager Armando Vega for a tour of the revamped L-Series Acoustic. The new L features the A.R.E. (Acoustic Resonance Enhancement) process which speeds up the natural aging process giving the appearance and warmth of an vintage guitar. It's a demo right up our alley, seeing as though our main workhorse is a Yamaha SJ-180 handed two generations down. We pick the LS26 with a smaller body and classic look that's similar to the one we've got a home.

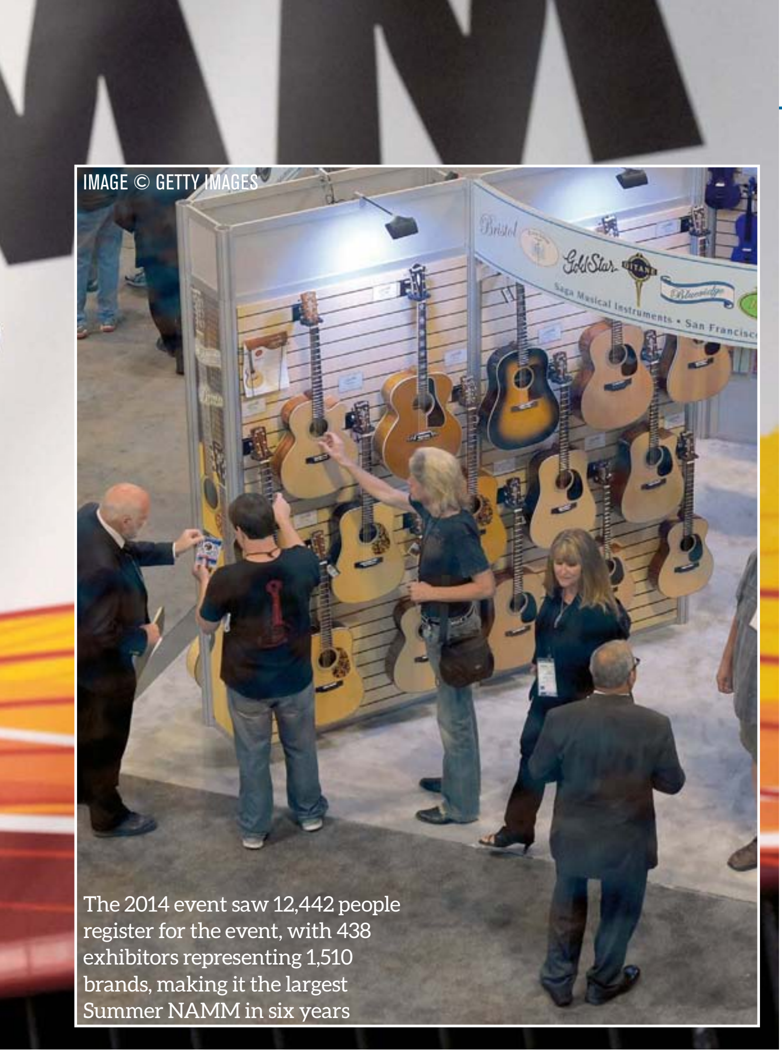
Our take? The LS26 sounds old. In a good way.

Pickups certainly have come a long way since our old Yamaha was first made. These days, they get it right and the passive under-saddle S.R.T. pickup sounds just like the acoustic guitar, only amplified. Still rich, still warm. Other L-Series enchancements include a thinner neck and lower string profile.

'So how exactly does a company make a new wood sound old?' we ask. 'Top secret,' Vega says with a smile.

A day in a massive showroom full of new guitars absolutely flies by and before we know it the sun is sinking and the hour is drawing near for Summer NAMM to close. There's time for just one more stop.

Tom Bedell stands at the Bedell Guitars booth looking casual with his red bandana and long silver hair. Tom is a laid-back, Mother Earth-loving kind of fellow and believes in taking his



The 2014 event saw 12,442 people register for the event, with 438 exhibitors representing 1,510 brands, making it the largest Summer NAMM in six years

instruments from "seed-to-song", supervising the process completely through from forest to finished guitar. All the Sitka is salvaged. No tonewoods from clear-cut trees are ever used. Each instrument comes with a hardbound journal detailing its creation every step of the way. It's a nice touch, one we've never seen before. Stories, journeys, seed-to-song guitars.

But how do they play? We try out the Earthsong, finding a deep soulful tone with fine response on the bass end. The Coffee House model carries a lot of charm with it's clarity and vintage feel. Every instrument we test looks and plays superbly.

'Man,' we tell Bedell, 'these are some beautiful guitars.' 'Thank you,' he replies. 'Really, it's a labor of love.'

One Bedell seems to be calling our name. Adirondack spruce and Brazilian rosewood. Intricate pearl vine inlay. Warm, mellow tones, clear as a mountain stream. Full sustain and shimmering overtones. The Summer of Love guitar fits like an old friend in our hands. I'll let you in on a little secret: if you listen long enough, the guitar will let you know what song she wants to play. We wait, fingers drifting across the pearl vine and the sound that finally comes forth is 'Knockin' On Heaven's Door'. Suddenly the noise of the showroom falls away. And there's just six strings and one sweet guitar.

The neon sizzles down Lower Broad as we make our way back home. There's a crowd gathered now and the sound that pours from every street corner honky-tonk is solid country gold. We played a lot of great new guitars today. It's a nice way to close out this Summer's NAMM.

A scruffy-looking kid stands at the far crosswalk with a cheap beat-up six-string and a hat on the ground half-full of dollars, singing his heart out with 'Brown-Eyed Girl'.

'Hey, man,' he calls out as we pass. 'If you know it, join in.' Flipping two bills into his hat, we begin to sing.

*For more info, visit: **www.namm.org***

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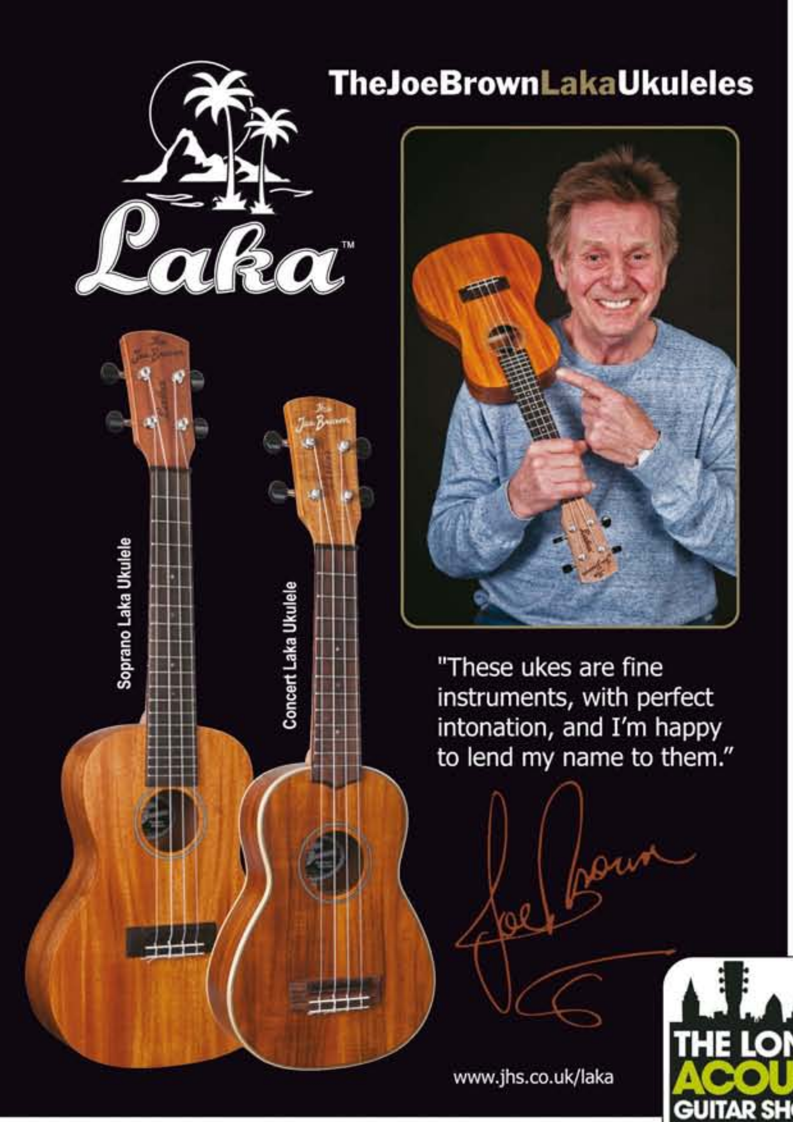

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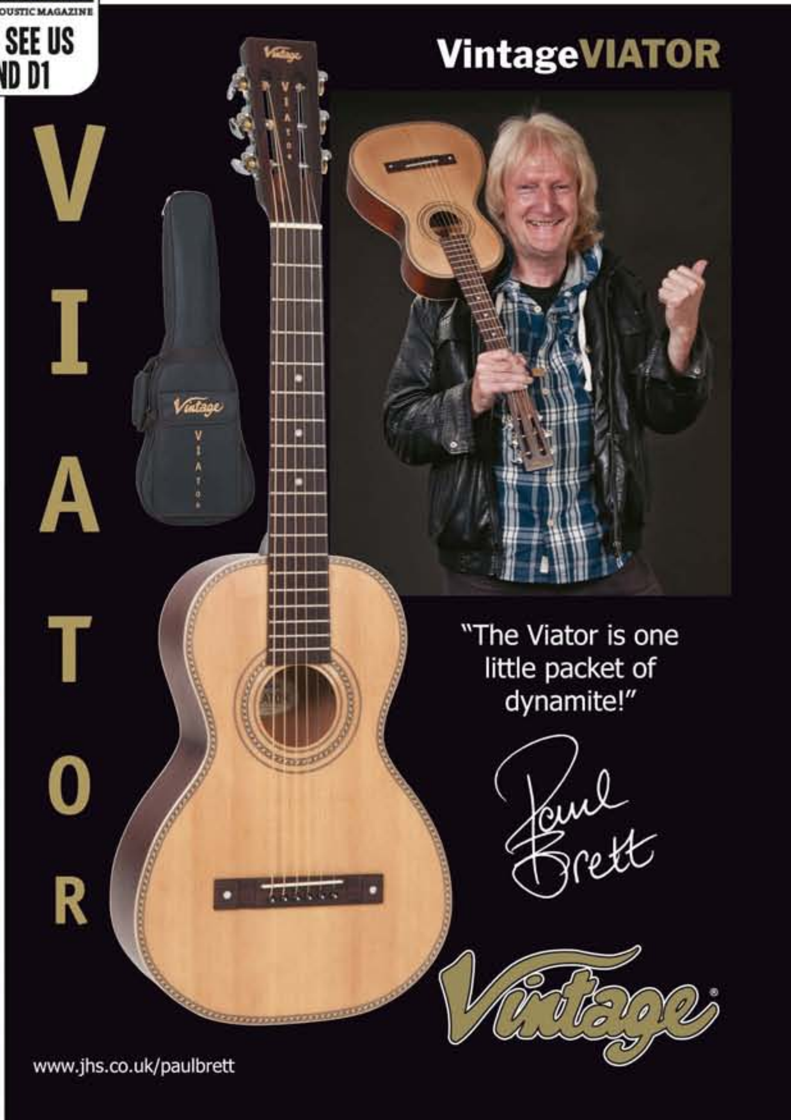

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US country superstar Jason Isbell performs on the main stage with wife Amanda Shires

Cambridge Folk Festival

WORDS: ANDY HUGHES IMAGES: CHARLES STURMAN

Fifty years since the Cambridge Folk Festival opened its gates, Acoustic celebrates the seminal festival's anniversary this year in style over July 31 – August 3, 2014

It's fifty years since Cambridge Council ploughed some money into a new idea – a folk festival to be held for the delight of the locals and the fans of folk music who found out and popped along. Fast-forward half a decade, and it's still here in its perfect home, the grounds of Cherry Hinton Hall with its two major stages, and many smaller ones dotted around the site.

For anyone whose perception of music festivals is limited to old news reports of Glastonbury before they fixed the drainage – punters covered in slimy mud from head to foot – you should know that Cambridge is about as far from that as it's possible to get. Even when we did get brief showers, you still have to look quite hard to find a puddle! Plus, it's a compact site, all on one level, which makes it easy for the festivalgoers to get around.

In true folk festival fashion, it was unusual not to see at least one acoustic guitar and a fiddle in the hands of most of the artists who turned out. Friday was a beautifully sunny day; everyone sorted out their folding chairs and blankets and settled down to enjoy some superlative performances from the absolute best of folk and acoustic musicians from across the globe.

If there was a performance to perfectly sum up the relaxed summer vibe of Friday at Cambridge, it was Cara Dillon and her band's performance which taxed no one's senses unduly, but fitted in perfectly with a quintessentially English day at the festival.

By contrast, Richard Thompson gave vent to his usual stirring songs underscored with his unique visceral guitar playing. Few artists consistently turn out the calibre of live and recorded work that Thompson produces, and it was entirely fitting that he was here again to remind people of why he is a legend in British music.

Festivals thrive on the unexpected, so Sinead O'Connor's inclusion as Friday's headline act must have confused more than some patrons. Not to worry, her

passionate performance was hailed as a triumph as she rattled through a variety of her catalogue songs and tracks from her new album, often seeming bemused by the fervent applause, as though she couldn't quite believe it was all for her. It was, and much deserved – a fitting end to the first day.

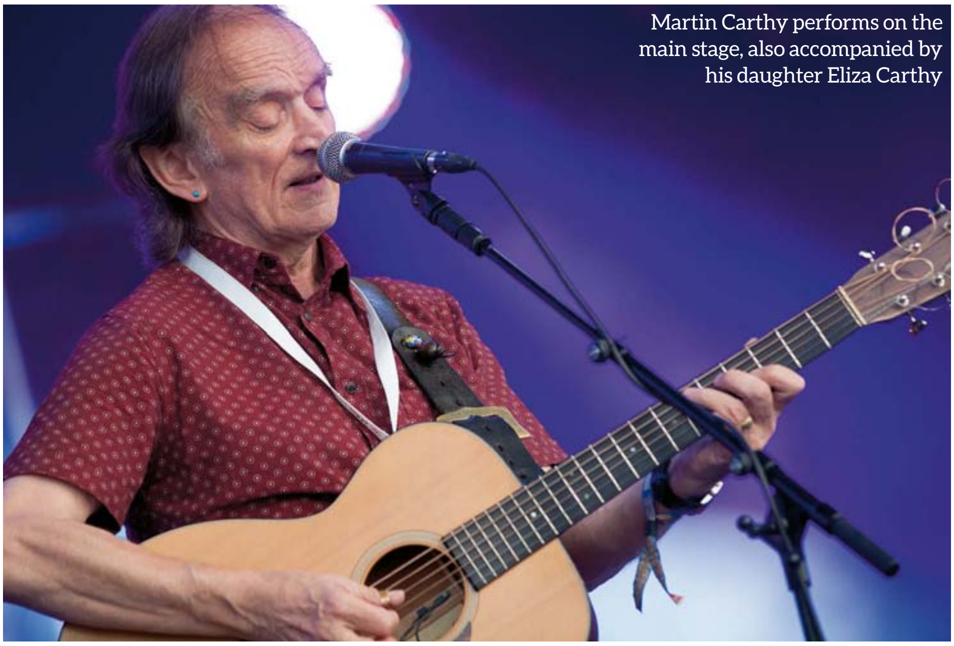
The Yves Lambert Trio brought some Cajun magic to the proceedings on Saturday, including Mr Lambert's joyful mangling of two languages – English and his native Quebec French as he engaged the audience between songs.

A wander down to the Club Tent was rewarded by short performances of musicians who simply turned up and offered to have a go – the true folk music ethos in action. A wonderful find was one Mike Hornsby who spoke with a thick Lancashire accent and sang perfect comedy versions of songs like 'Dance The Night Away' and 'The Boxer' with his own unique lyrical interpretations. The crowd would certainly have enjoyed a lot more – hopefully he will return.

Folk music and festival legend Martin Carthy played the main stage with daughter Eliza, featuring traditional songs and tracks from the recent album *The Moral Of The Elephant*. There is a unique atmosphere between them, professional musicians who adore playing together and seriously respect each other, and a dad and daughter who obviously love each other very much – a triumph highlighting the wonderful folk music dynasty.

In keeping with the celebratory vibe was The Full English, which could possibly described as a supergroup – if traditional music went in for such things – featuring Seth Lakeman, Martin Simpson, Fay Hield, Sam Sweeny and others playing straight-down-the-line folk music and very much emphasising the traditional approach of the festival this year.

Show of the day was the always reliable Loudon Wainwright III who never fails to provoke laughter and thoughts with his masterful wordplay and his performance-art method of conveying them to his rapturous audience. Where Loudon keeps finding the inspiration for his witty and occasionally sad songs is an on-going mystery, but while he can find it, and put songs together as cleverly as this, he is always going to have an appreciative audience wherever he plays. He did manage to sail a little close to the wind – as usual – by singing a song referring to Gaza, but that's Loudon's strength, he can and does take topical happenings and remind us about them in his songs. He also managed to cuss at full volume, which may have ruffled a few cable knit sweaters and caused the odd tankard of ale to spill, but this is 2014, so it wasn't seen as a major upset.



Martin Carthy performs on the main stage, also accompanied by his daughter Eliza Carthy

Roseanne Cash brought an entirely different side of the American musical experience to Cambridge. As well as the name, she does seem to have inherited her father's atmospheric skills with words and music, and the burning intensity of her set was welcome indeed with the audience.

Next up was *Acoustic* magazine regular Jason Isbell – a musician from Alabama whose poignant songs of doomed romance were so hypnotic; he had one of the best atmospheres for a set throughout the entire weekend. The effortless manner in which Isbell and his wife, fiddle player Amanda Shires, held the festival audience's attention is a tribute to the strength and depth of his ability as a songwriter, and his consummate skill as a live performer. It was all done without flash, without fuss, just letting the music do the talking – and if you have songs as wonderful as this, why would you do anything differently? Jason Ibell is a musician whose recorded material demands urgent investigation, and it goes without saying that you should get to one of his live shows. His

Another US country act, Rosanne Cash, makes an apperance at the Cambridge folk bash

latest album *Southeastern* was hailed a success by the country world – and is one of our favourites of last year!

The festival programme promised a "surprise guest" but anyone who spotted Kate Rusby at the signing tent but noticed that she wasn't mentioned on the bill for the day probably figured it out in advance. Kate's performance was as flawless and delightful as you would expect from the "first lady of folk" as the media have labelled her.

It wouldn't be Cambridge without at least one non-traditional – at least in the UK folk sense – act on the bill, and this year it was Ladysmith Black Mambazo – an incredible choral vocal group from South Africa.

The frankly baffling awe in which Van Morrison is held as a live performer was in full view as he headlined the Sunday, closing the festival's 50th anniversary year. Van brought his signature vocals as his superlative band attempted – and failed - to inject some life into his perfunctory singing on 'Baby Please Don't Go', and others. Morrison may enjoy a reputation as a white soul singer of note but, frankly, on the basis of this performance, it is difficult to understand the reputation he retains as a live musician when his heart and his attention, were very obviously elsewhere. Ambling off stage to leave his band to perform an extended jam session offered nothing so much as the thought that he was simply bored with going through the motions, and he might as well go and do something else. Morrison's fans continue to come to watch him with rapturous devotion, yet it seems Morrison continues to ignore them.

Acoustic's favourite Irish troubadours, Alfie and Harry of Hudson Taylor

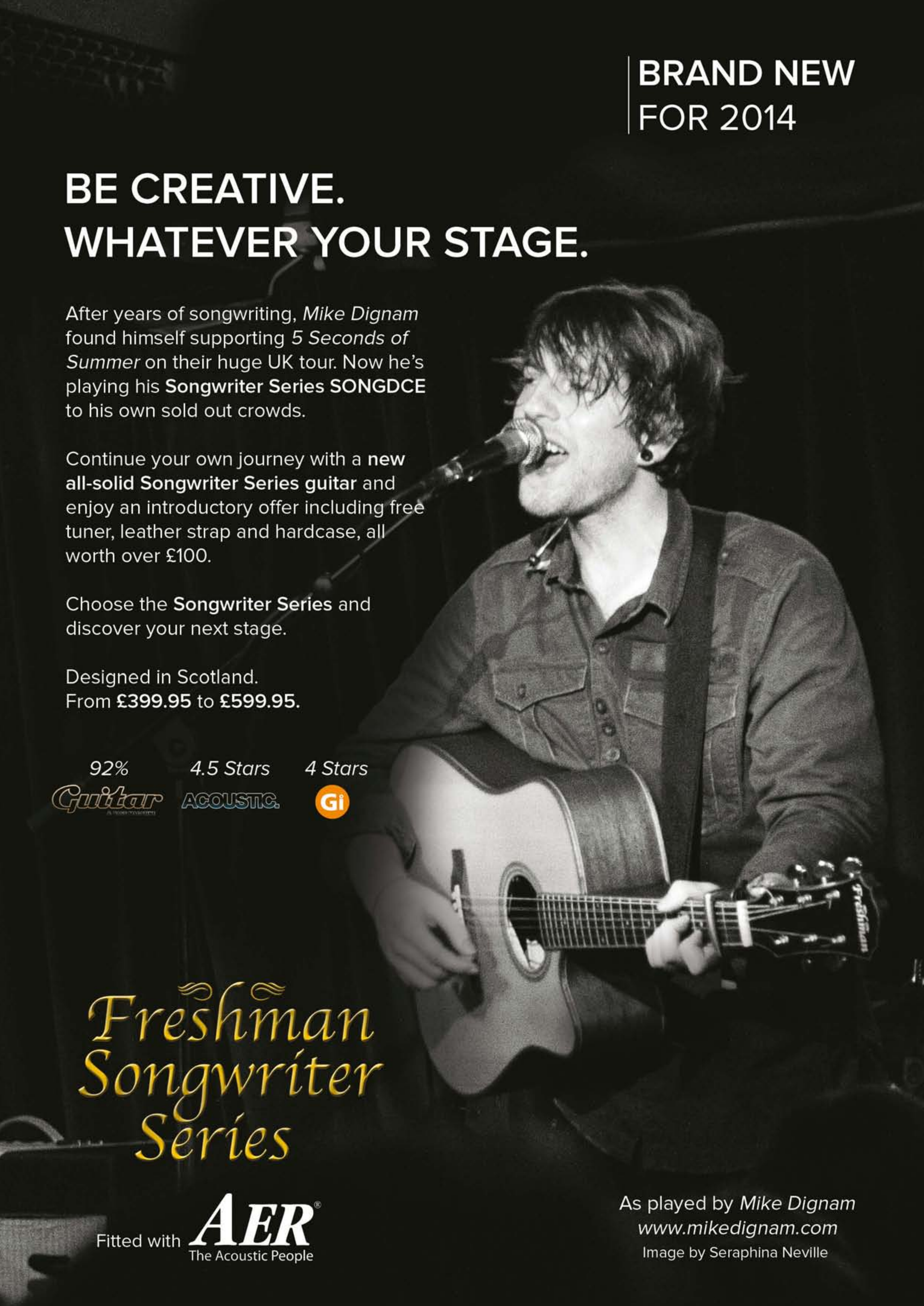
Seth Lakeman returns to Cambridge for the 2014 festival

If you really wanted to see the vibrant spirit of Irish music unleashed on a joyful ecstatic audience, then the place to be was the second stage when Harry and Alfie Hudson Taylor exploded onto the stage in a riot of enthusiasm, passion, and sheer joy to be alive. It's hard to believe that the duo were busking in their native Dublin only three years ago, but they bring that enthusiastic rapport with any audience that buskers develop to their professional stage show now, and the audience loved them for it. After witnessing their knock-out performance at last year's London Acoustic Guitar Show when they blew the socks off the assembled patrons who saw them, it was with eager anticipation that we got a good position to see them do it all again. This duo has it all: they look good, they write wonderful, literate melodic songs, they play with soaring energy, and their obvious joy in doing all that simply shines through and bathes the audience in their awesome glow. They debuted last year in The Dome at this festival, and now they have stepped up to stage two – a top slot on the main stage must surely await them next summer, and in the mean time, their debut album will be out this autumn so keep your eyes peeled.

Apart from the seemingly misplaced Mississippi All Stars, and the grumpiest man in music taking up an undeserved top place, the Cambridge Folk Festival did itself proud once again this year with its eye firmly on its traditional roots. It's that policy of sticking to its original brief that has allowed Cambridge to grow and thrive as an annual festival. They have often brought in performers who bear little, if any resemblance to traditional folk music, but musical snobbery is the death knell for this type of event, where a degree of diversity is essential. Bringing in some of the masses provides a budget and platform for the core musicians – a fact which the organisers realised early on, and have not forgotten since.

Fifty years on from when an unknown Paul Simon appeared for a fee of £15, and fourty-nine years on from Martin Carthy's first appearance here, Cambridge Folk Festival has got everything it needs in place to continue – a core audience, an expanding younger contingent, a beautiful site, and the continued backing of the Cambridge council. If only all festivals were as lucky… In the meantime, folk music is in safe hands.

Tickets for the 51st Cambridge Folk Festival will go on sale on December 1 2014. The festival will run from July 30 to August 2, 2015. For more info, visit: www.cambridgefolkfestival.co.uk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HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN HOLLY

WORDS: TERI SACCONE

WILLIAMS

Although her grandad modernised country music, Americana singer-songwriter Holly Williams gets no love from the elitist country music radio in the USA, disproving the old adage of "it's not what you know – it's who you know."

Country radio be damned, though, as Holly has released her third and finest album *The Highway* to both a loyal and burgeoning fan base beyond Nashville (she's got a substantial following in the UK and Europe).

Despite the country snub, Williams is thriving as an independent artist, making beautiful music on her own terms. Besides that she's pretty darn close to perfect: disarmingly warm, a real survivor (she endured a near fatal car crash a few years back), cultivated a successful marriage to musician Chris Coleman (Kings of Leon), is a savvy businesswoman, cooks like a champion, and, well, just *look* at her.

When *Acoustic* had a sit-down with her this summer while she was here for live dates, she was elegantly rocking a pregnancy belly. Glowing not only from impending motherhood and the blazing July sun beating down on us, but also the afterglow of having shared the stage with husband Chris the last few nights. Her wit and wisdom in our interview only galvanise the brilliance of her music.

She boldly declares that high quality songwriting is a "genetic trait" and not a hard-won skill. Despite her modesty, don't miss out on the myriad gems on *The Highway*. And if we're lucky, Miss Williams will return to these shores in the not-too-distant future for some wicked live shows (Jimmy Page was spotted at her London gig in June). This lady is nothing if not a true grafter.

> *"I get no airplay on country radio. I'm like everyone else – touring in a van trying to win fans over one crowd at a time."*

Your dad is Hank Williams, Jr. and everyone knows your granddad Hank Williams, Sr. – but I don't know much about your mom. Did she influence you musically in any way?

Funnily enough, she was my big musical influence, not my dad. She was a classical pianist and an amazing player who played piano every night and she is also an amazing singer. My mom wasn't a professional – she just played for pleasure. I found all of my favourites like Tom Waits and Dylan on my own. Again, it wasn't like my dad got us into music. I didn't grow up with music around my dad. People assume that we did. We saw him on the farm (her parents divorced when Holly was little) and we'd be outside with him or we'd go fishing, but music was not something he brought to the table.

Ironically you didn't learn piano growing up…

No, unfortunately I did not. Guitar was my first instrument and I started late, as a teenager.

You are a Gibson player since forever, right?

I've honestly never tried other guitars. My dad gave me a J-45 when I was 18 so I always had them. My J has been with me through it all: buses, vans, planes, trains, and it always stays in tune and it works very well. I normally carry it with me slung on my back, except when I'm pregnant.

Do you have any heirloom guitars from Hank Sr.?

My dad only has one guitar I hope to get some day. He gave one on loan to the Country Music Hall of Fame. But even when my dad's gone and it's mine, it would feel kind of weird to take it away from the public who love it. It's probably worth a million dollars, sits in a glass case and people love that – so why take it away? Neil Young has the other one and I'd love for him to will me that one and that's it. I do have Hank's old fishing pole, though.

You run a small record label (Georgiana Records), two funky shops in Nashville, you make music, have the cooking blog, and a baby on the way – how do you juggle the domestic side and the musician's life?

That's not all because we're also doing a huge home renovation adding a second floor to our old little house. Our house is from 1908 and we have no garage and have drums and equipment coming out of our ears. Soon we'll have cribs and strollers so we had to add the space. Right now at home we have a dog sitter there, a building crew and we hope the house is okay as we're on the road for the whole of summer… I have two stores in Nashville and I love to throw dinner parties, I love cleaning, cooking and then I have this road life on a tour bus, staying in different hotels. It's my "other life", I guess!

How were you feeling, creatively speaking, with the making of your third album *The Highway*?

It's on my own label so it's very nerve wracking to be overseeing all of it, but I do hire a great PR team and good distributors to take care of all of that for me. These songs came from a natural place despite my crazy, hectic life. These songs came to me like they fell out of the sky. I pray and

they do come through to me. If I try to write it doesn't happen. 'Waiting On June' [a stunning seven-minute folk song about her grandparents] just popped into my head while I was cleaning. It was very freeing this time around making this one.

You are six months pregnant and your husband is in the music business, too, which certainly helps in terms of you understanding each other's careers, but now you'll have a kid to raise too...

Oh, yeah, it definitely helps that we both are musicians. I really wanted a family but was not in a rush and I'm not sure how I'll tour with her. Our schedules are never the same but I get to go on their [Kings of Leon] tours. We have to figure out how to make our schedules sync up better I guess!

How did the opening of both a funky boutique and a general store in Tennessee come about?

Music is my first love and always will be, but retail is just in my blood too. Hank Williams and his wife Audrey owned one of Nashville's first retail stores on Broadway – Hank and Audrey's Corral – and my grandfather on my mom's side owned a mercantile, and that's what my new store is named, White's Mercantile. So I suppose that retail streak is in me too. Plus I get so wrapped up in being a solo artist that having the stores brings me out of my little world and we have 12 employees. I interact with the public, our suppliers, and it's quite different than the clothing store in that we stock everything from artisan olive oil, to dog food and French antiques. It's everything I find on my travels that I love. I often fold jeans, stock shelves, work the register. It's a break from the music scene. We've weathered the bad economic times very well so far.

You are perceived as an alt-country meets Americana artist. How has the Nashville scene embraced you?

I get no airplay on country radio. I'm like everyone else – touring in a van trying to win fans over one crowd at a time. Literally. It's not that I see myself operating outside of country music in that I don't like it, or I don't want to be there, but I'm not thought of as being country to them. Instead, everybody calls me an Americana artist or a singer-songwriter, along with those people who are not mainstream enough for country radio today. I think 'The Highway' is a country song, but radio doesn't hear it that way, so I'm just living on the outskirts so-to-speak. Country music is so boxed in there. I could probably be a lot richer if I had signed with a major label and did straight-up country songs, but I wanted to be able to find my sound on my own. It's the longer road, but the more fulfilling one.

Your lyrics confront hard issues like addiction, morbidity, the human frailties. Yet there's an air of fun with the proceedings. You are 33 but you write from an older perspective...

Part of what I write is about getting older, ageing, and reminiscing and wanting things to be back to how they were, like picking pecans and hanging with the cows on Papa's farm. There's been a lot of tragedy in my family.

Musically, what is priority number one for you?

Songwriting. I was writing lyrics and poems since I was eight years old and I knew early on I wanted to be a writer and tell stories. I picked up a guitar very late at age 17 or 18, but I only want to be remembered as a good songwriter.

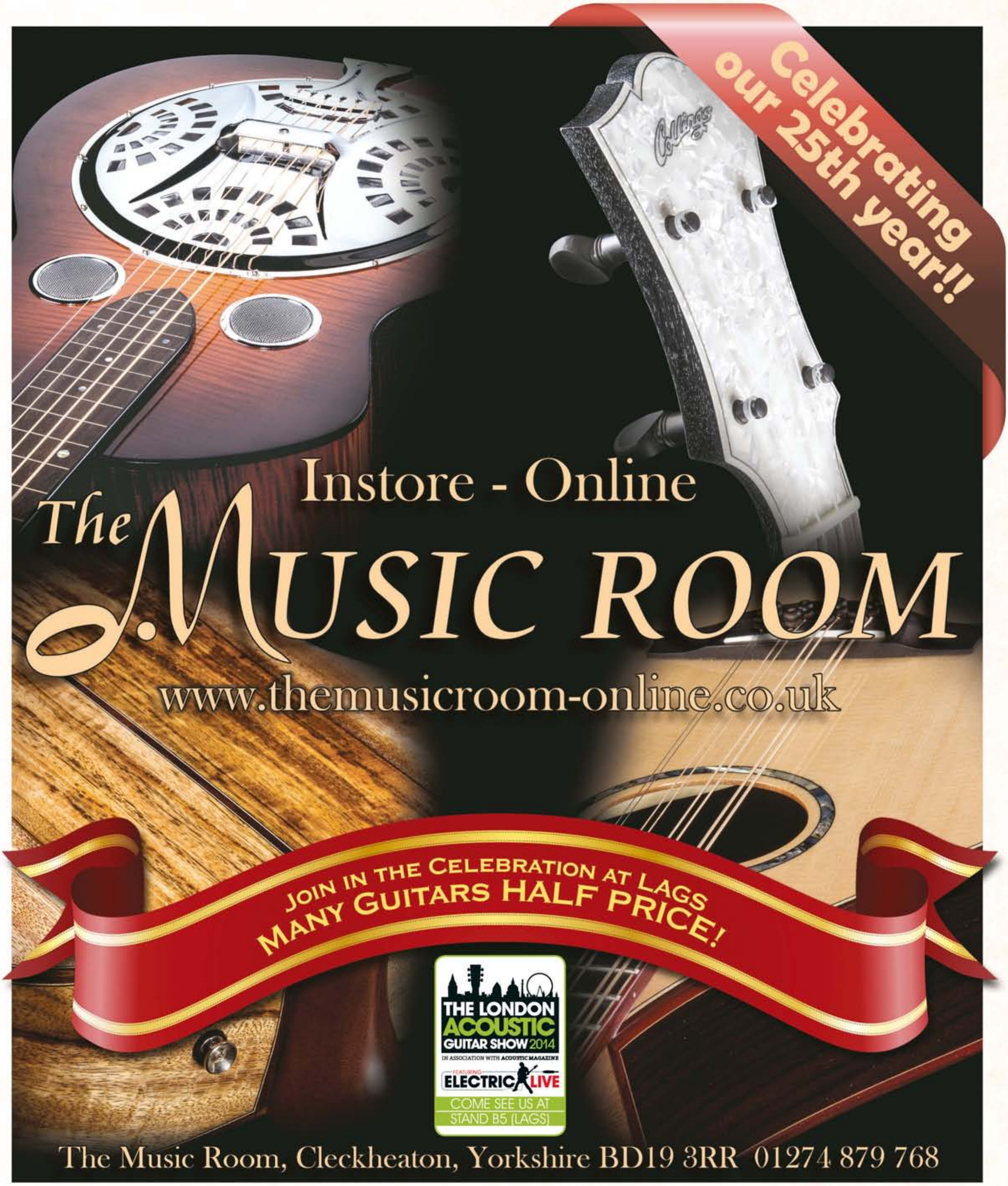
Will you take time out before or after the baby is due?

Just like a couple months because I have to think about getting my next album out by August 2015 to hit my goals. My husband gets off the road in November and it will be the first time we've had serious time off together in years. So we will go into nesting mode then together. Meanwhile, I will be home writing before and after the baby comes. I work out of my kitchen, so it's nothing fancy or highfalutin. I like the freedom of having my own label because I can put out music when I want – but it can get stressful at times.

You clearly embrace everything you do.

I feel very blessed.

Holly's third album The Highway *is out now. For more info, visit:* ***www.hollywilliams.com***



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Guitars and Mandolins

RODNEY CROWELL

A staff writer in Nashville for Jerry Reed, touring with Emmylou Harris, and once married to Johnny Cash's daughter, Rodney Crowell is about as country as hickory smoked ribs but, as he tells Acoustic, the road's been long and winding.

WORDS: JULIAN PIPER

On a hot Houston night in August 1972, Rodney Crowell placed his brand new C.F. Martin & Co. D-35 on the back seat of his friend's baby blue Chevrolet Impala, and drove non-stop to Nashville. Falsely promised a lucrative recording contract and a tour supporting Kenny Rogers, reality hit when Rodney ended up sleeping on a park bench and downing 69-cent breakfasts. But as he later recalled: 'I knew I had to live or die by whatever I could make of my music; I had very little confidence in anything other than the songs I knew how to play.'

Success proved elusive, and it wasn't until after he'd released several solo albums – 15 years after passing the hat at Bishop's Pub on Nashville's 32nd Street – that Crowell finally lifted into the country stratosphere with his 1988 record *Diamonds And Dirt*. Five hit singles followed, but dogged by personal problems, his subsequent career trajectory remained frustratingly erratic.

However, now with acclaimed albums like the autobiographical *Houston Kid* to his credit, numerous Grammy Awards and his 2013 collaboration with Emmylou Harris on *Old Yellow Moon*, a release that also received a Grammy Award for Americana album of the year, it seems he's weathered the storms. Rodney Crowell's star is currently riding higher than ever.

His latest album *Tarpaper Sky,* his first solo release since 2008, is as good as anything he's ever come up with – a dazzling collection of songs that snake through everything from the Cajun romp of 'Fever On The Bayou', to 1950s style ballads and honky-tonk stomps.

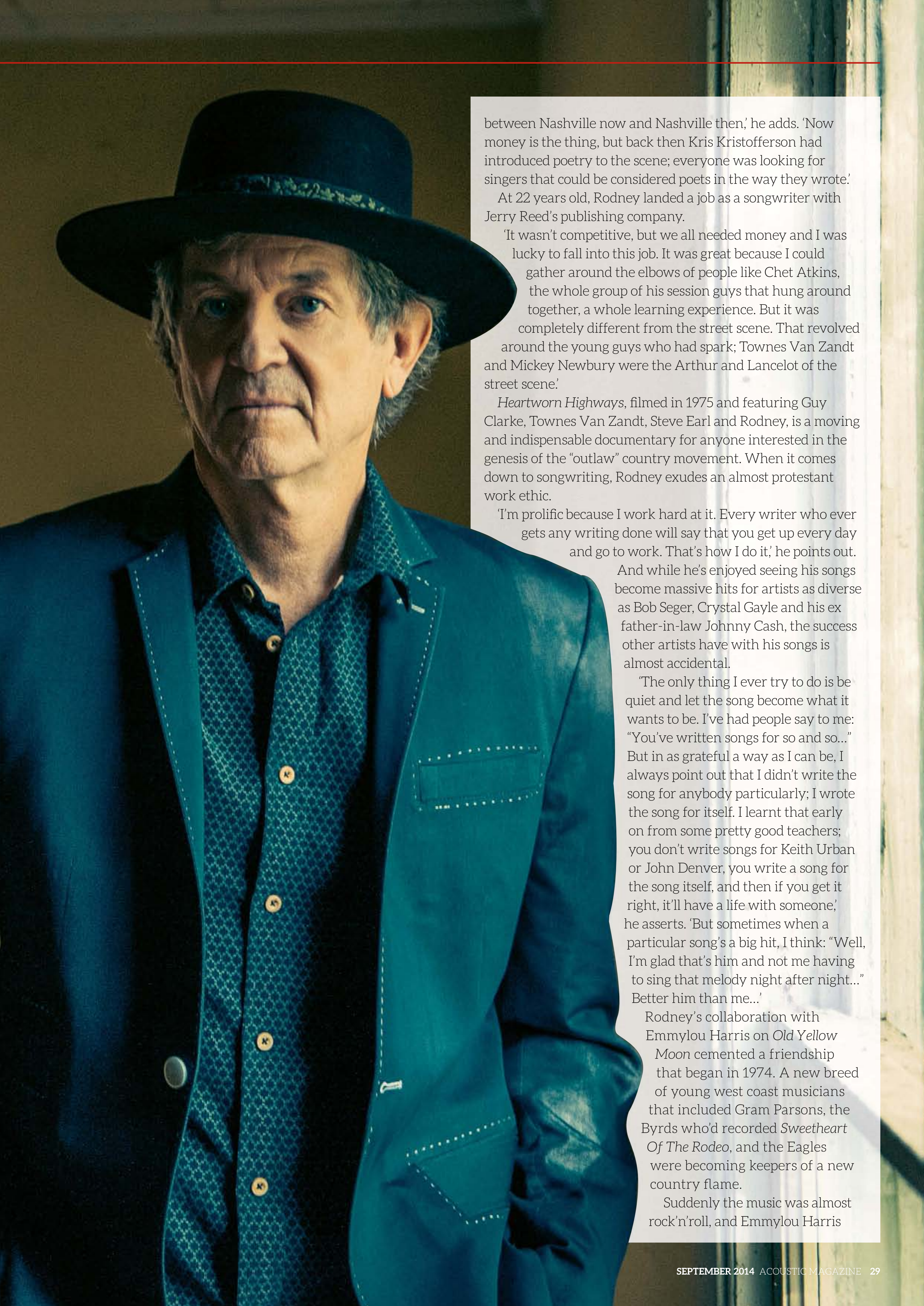
Crowell was born in Houston and heard the lonesome sounds of Hank Williams when he was still in short pants.

'My father was a construction worker, sharecrop farm kid who wound up in Houston and who played guitar and dreamt of going to Nashville to be on the Grand Ole Opry. He had all these scratched up old 78s, all Hank's stuff, so I listened to him constantly,' he recalls. 'I learned how to put a record on when I was four years old and Hank's music was the first thing that really hit me, then I heard Johnny Cash with 'I Walk The Line', along with 'Nadine' by Chuck Berry, and Dylan's 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' – all these great recordings held me in thrall.'

Rodney now calls Austin, Texas, home, and it's clearly a place he loves. 'It's a musical haven. Years back you'd hear Joe Gracey playing Willie Nelson, Ray Price, and the Rolling Stones together; it was always a place where the genres faded away, and it was a real question as to whether it was good or not. You wouldn't play Pat Boone side by side with the Rolling Stones, but you could certainly play Willie Nelson beside them,' he laughs. 'But as a kid I knew early on what was good.'

Rodney "stumbled" as he puts it, into Nashville along with a stellar group of singer-songwriters including Guy Clarke, Townes Van Zandt, Steve Earle and John Hiatt; musicians that would later form the very bedrock of Americana music.

'Steve arrived in town wearing a big black Stetson hat, nothing but skin and bones, but even though he was only 17 years old, he was already coming up with songs like 'Darling, Commit Me' and 'Ben McCulloch'. He was well ahead of me in terms of writing something of any substance; I had to pay attention for a good while,' he chuckles. 'We all just wanted to come up with something that was more than just a song; we wanted to create something that we could maybe one day look back on and consider was art. And that's the difference



between Nashville now and Nashville then,' he adds. 'Now money is the thing, but back then Kris Kristofferson had introduced poetry to the scene; everyone was looking for singers that could be considered poets in the way they wrote.'

At 22 years old, Rodney landed a job as a songwriter with Jerry Reed's publishing company.

'It wasn't competitive, but we all needed money and I was lucky to fall into this job. It was great because I could gather around the elbows of people like Chet Atkins, the whole group of his session guys that hung around together, a whole learning experience. But it was completely different from the street scene. That revolved around the young guys who had spark; Townes Van Zandt and Mickey Newbury were the Arthur and Lancelot of the street scene.'

Heartworn Highways, filmed in 1975 and featuring Guy Clarke, Townes Van Zandt, Steve Earl and Rodney, is a moving and indispensable documentary for anyone interested in the genesis of the "outlaw" country movement. When it comes down to songwriting, Rodney exudes an almost protestant work ethic.

'I'm prolific because I work hard at it. Every writer who ever gets any writing done will say that you get up every day and go to work. That's how I do it,' he points out.

And while he's enjoyed seeing his songs become massive hits for artists as diverse as Bob Seger, Crystal Gayle and his ex father-in-law Johnny Cash, the success other artists have with his songs is almost accidental.

'The only thing I ever try to do is be quiet and let the song become what it wants to be. I've had people say to me: "You've written songs for so and so…" But in as grateful a way as I can be, I always point out that I didn't write the song for anybody particularly; I wrote the song for itself. I learnt that early on from some pretty good teachers; you don't write songs for Keith Urban or John Denver, you write a song for the song itself, and then if you get it right, it'll have a life with someone,' he asserts. 'But sometimes when a particular song's a big hit, I think: "Well, I'm glad that's him and not me having to sing that melody night after night…" Better him than me…'

Rodney's collaboration with Emmylou Harris on *Old Yellow Moon* cemented a friendship that began in 1974. A new breed of young west coast musicians that included Gram Parsons, the Byrds who'd recorded *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo*, and the Eagles were becoming keepers of a new country flame.

Suddenly the music was almost rock'n'roll, and Emmylou Harris

was at the forefront. After hearing some of Rodney's songs, the pair met up.

'We stayed up all night and played every old country song that we could think of. That was very much the way Emmy and Gram [Parsons] had gotten on, and I think she really loved the fact that I knew all of those songs. We'd go: "Wait, you haven't heard this one" and then it was: "God, we should get together for a duet record."'

Were you intimidated when you initially got together? 'Oh yeah – I crumpled when I first met Emmylou. All the guys do... In fact, I still do!'

Crowell, who was living in Austin, Texas, next caught up with Emmylou Harris after a gig at the Armadillo World Headquarters. Offered an invitation to join her Hot Band and a plane ticket to Los Angeles, Crowell packed his bags and left the next day to tour as rhythm guitarist.

'Oh, I was smitten,' he admits. 'I was and still am. She was like a faun, this wonderful pure person who hung out with the guys, smoke and drank with us and cussed like a sailor! Actually over the years we became really great friends, and because we've never been romantically hooked up, we both laugh a lot when we're around each other, and it's why we can still work together.'

Four years in the making and recorded direct to tape, *Tarpaper Sky* finds Crowell reunited with guitarist Steuart Smith, bassist Michael Rhodes, and drummer Eddie Bayers – the same musicians with whom he recorded his 1988 breakout album *Diamonds And Dirt*. But there's the similarity ends. More introspective than his earlier work, Crowell and his band nonetheless tackle everything from roadhouse rockers, to his heartfelt tribute to Guy Clarke with 'I Wouldn't Be Me Without You.'

'Guy's influence on me was absolutely profound,' he says. 'The single best first editor-songwriter I've ever come across; perhaps if I knew Leonard Cohen I'd think of him in the same way, but he truly has a precise command of language. You can be a star or you can be an artist, or you can be an artist and then become a star; I'm not sure it works the other way around. They're both okay, but it works best if you choose one and work at it. Guy was an artist and after being around him I knew that's what I wanted to try and be. And so that song came about when I read this old Irish poem 'May The Road Come To Meet You' – I thought of Guy and particularly the line: "May you always stay in touch with the things that keep you young."'

There's a very live feel to the album, as though you just went in the studio and recorded what came out...

'We started work on the material over 10 years ago, spent a lot of time working on it, arranging the songs and rehearsing. Because these are guys who're working all the time, they get pretty adept at picking up what I might be trying to do quickly; I'm not the sort of guy who goes into a studio with a riff in his mind and then builds a song as it goes along. But we'd all go into the studio, make a circle of electric guitars, drums and bass, throw away the headphones and play.'

'I was collaborating with a writer called Mary Carr who's a poet,' he says of the album's title. 'We were talking about an image and she said something about a sanded down moon. For the most part, when I collaborate, I'm not one to draw attention to who recreated what line, because that can become

an intellectual pursuit rather than an understanding of what we created as one thing. But if you're lucky these things can just roll off the tongue and I said: "Yeah – that's good". Then I came out with "tarpaper sky", which was just my instant reaction to her saying about a sanded down moon.'

"I crumpled when I first met Emmylou. All the guys do... We stayed up all night and played every old country song that we could think of."

You cover a lot of bases with this album and 'Fever On The Bayou' almost has a kind of John Hiatt feel to it.

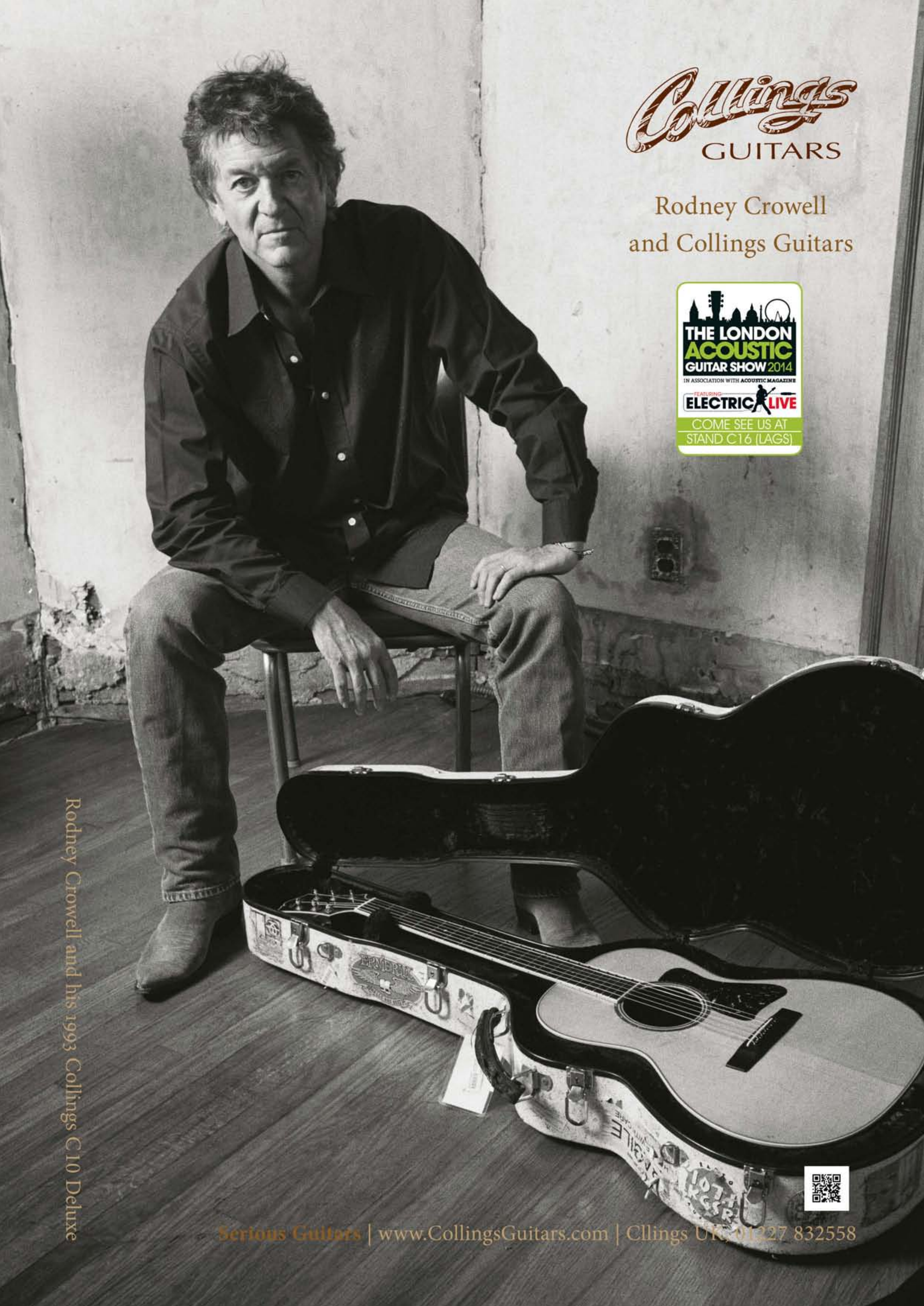
'Oh, really – that's interesting, but I haven't listened to it for some time. I listen to albums a lot right after I've finished them, to make sure I've got it right, but once that's over I don't listen to them any more; maybe seven years later I might put it on and think: "Uhh, that's better than I remember" or "That's not very good," he says, 'but I started writing that song 20 or so years ago and could never find a decent last verse. Then one day someone came up with the word "fromdelay" which I liked because it's kind of bastardised French and English – like Cajun. That gave me the idea to write a last verse, but it took twenty years!'

'A 1932 Gibson L000, and a little slotted head C.F. Martin & Co. parlour guitar are my favourite to write with. I also like a Gibson J-45 a friend gave me, and a Rickenbacker 475 that Jack Hughes gave me. Then I also have one of Guy's guitars that I love.'

You've said it took a long time for you to find your voice, particularly when singing alongside someone like Emmylou Harris. When you listen to the songs on *Tarpaper Sky*, do you think you could have written them forty years ago when you were starting out?

'Well I found my voice about 10 years ago, got to a point where I really felt happy with it. But it wasn't intimidating singing with Emmylou; maybe if it had been Van Morrison I might have been worried! When you're working with an old friend, the end result is a kind of mutual confidence building. But with coming up with songs, of course I miss the inspiration of youth, the fire that you once had and the passion. It doesn't happen as you get older.'

Tarpaper Sky by Rodney Crowell is out now on New West Records. For more info, visit: www.rodneycrowell.com



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COMFORT IN A DIFFERENT SOUND

*Grant Nicholas, the multi-million selling rockstar with Feeder, turns his hand at releasing his first debut album – **Yorktown Heights** – full of acoustic goodness and, as he admits, the key to unlocking a freedom that he's never had in his career... until now.*

WORDS: SAM WISE

It's fair to say that Grant Nicholas has had an eventful career so far. Right from the early '90s, he was in bands with drummer Jon Lee, as they went from Raindancer to Reel, to eventually, by the time they got signed, Feeder. Success rarely comes overnight, and it was 2001 before Feeder hit the big time, with arguably still their most recognisable hit, 'Buck Rogers' (if you say the words "He's got a brand new car, looks like a Jaguar" in your head, and the melody doesn't follow, you probably didn't own a radio in 2001), from the album *Echo Park*. The following year, Lee took his own life, and for many bands that might have been the end, cut off at the moment of their emergence into the sunlight. Grant Nicholas, however, is not a man easily knocked from his path, and was able to draw purpose from the traumatic events, writing a suite of songs dealing with his feelings about the situation which formed the core of *Comfort In Sound*, the band's next release, which became the band's best seller. This was the high watermark for Feeder, but four more albums, and plenty of stadium tours and festival appearances have followed. After such a sustained career in one outfit, then, it came as a surprise to many when Nicholas, while emphasising that Feeder was still very much a going concern for him, announced the release of his first solo album, *Yorktown Heights*. *Acoustic* caught up with him the day after the album's release, which went off with a live show in support, leaving Nicholas understandably in a very positive mood.

It felt inappropriate to discuss anything else before understanding why a man who had been in evolutions of the same musical unit since his teen years would choose to suddenly take a different tack. Grant is clearly a little suspicious of journalists, no doubt having been misquoted over the years in search of a story, and was quick to correct my suggestion that he'd been in Feeder that long.

'Well, I haven't really be in Feeder that long – the band really started in my early 20s, and before that I'd been playing in school bands,' he starts. 'After 22 years of Feeder or whatever, people were asking me why I never did any solo stuff, and I felt after 20 years, I wanted to have a little break, get away from touring, do some writing and think about the next album. I started doing some writing, and there was a vibe around it, Taka [Hirosi, Feeder's bass player] was doing a little project in Japan, so it seemed a good time to do it. I know the diehard fans know we do some acoustic stuff, but the man in the pub tends to know us for big rock songs, and I wanted to explore something different.'

> *"Live, I only really use my 1976 Gibson J200 which I've had since the early days of Feeder..."*

Grant had just debuted the *Yorktown Heights* material in a band format, and I wondered what, for a man who had been in a band for so long, the word "solo" really meant – was it just about having creative control, or would we be seeing him performing alone sometimes?

'I don't think there are expectations for this. It is an album I made because I wanted to, not knowing if it would even be released. Worst case, I thought there would be artists out there who would want the songs, but I self-funded it, and have only involved some managers recently, so now it's going to be released, but there was no big game plan. If it does well, great, but if not, no big deal; I want people to like it, but I'm not feeling

lots of pressure, and I felt it was important to do something different without the big heavy industry weight pushing behind it. I've already done some solo things, and the band is kind of a hybrid, just with keyboards, bass and a small kit. With Feeder records, I want the performance to be very close to the album, but with this I wanted to be able to do it in different ways, with different combinations. The set has some tracks that are just me, some with three or four of us – it really varies. The Feeder stuff is very full, but I wanted things I could strip back. I was listening to a lot of '70s records, and I wanted it to be not aggressive, but really fat and warm.'

I want to talk about the lyrics, the inspiration behind the songs, themes, how the album hangs together, but Grant becomes a little defensive. Given the level of media interest in a band like Feeder, particularly in the wake of the death of a member, and what we know about the propensity of the press to make things up, it wasn't hard to understand his discomfort but, nevertheless, it was the moment he showed his true colours, and the immense weight and sometimes confusion of having your creative efforts mean so much to so many people.

'It's so hard when you talk about lyrics; I'm a songwriter, and I write about life, and things aren't always rosy. I just get inspired sometimes by my own experiences and family life, what's happening to my friends, things I read in the newspaper, and those have all gone into this album. Things do get hard, and there are some darker songs in there, but there is plenty of positivity, and really I don't like to talk about the lyrics too much, I don't want to spoil people's interpretation of what they're hearing. There are love songs, songs about the day in day out of city life, people stuck in jobs that they don't really like. I've even written a song about my son, which I've never done before, but I prefer sometimes to write songs about an invented character, more like Tom Petty or Neil Young, perhaps, which is a great way to do it.'

'If you're too soul-baring, people overanalyse it,' he reflects, 'but there is plenty of truth in this record. It's not all just about taking it apart and over-interpreting the lyrics. If you're writing songs, you can have a great week, best week of your life, and write a really sad song. I've got a couple of fans who get very involved and very attached to the lyrics, and it's very flattering, but at the same time it can be a little bit worrying when people start to get obsessive. Most of the people who are interested in Feeder are pretty cool people, but there are times when it gets to be really intense. I went for a swim one time, and I got approached by a guy who said he'd been going through a really hard time, been in rehab, and felt that a certain album had really helped him. I think maybe you don't expect people to get comfort in music so much, but they really do. That's what I love about writing too, when you're writing a track, it can be a really therapeutic thing for a writer. That's why I love being a songwriter I suppose – it helps me to deal with the world.'

After Grant sheds some light on his lyrics, we moved on to more comfortable ground – his live rig.

'On the record, there's plenty of clean Jazzmaster, but live I'm only really using my 1976 Gibson J200 which I've had since the early days of Feeder, and I'm also using a Taylor on a couple of tracks. Live and on some of the album tracks I'm using a Guild M20, and in a strange sort of way, they have a fuller sound than the J200. I only discovered them fairly recently, but they're getting hard to find, and more expensive. Those are going into a JMI AC30, and sometimes a Fender DeVille or a Bassman, with a Peter Cornish overdrive, and an LR Baggs DI, which I love. At the moment in my Guilds I'm using single coil

Fishman Rare Earths, and I really like them. I prefer the single coil to the humbucker, but my main guitar sound is just acoustic. I keep it very simple in the studio though, with a single mic right near the soundhole. The overdriven stuff is really only for the band shows, and I'm trying to find a bit of a different, more of a lo-fi sound, like the Eels, a bit dirty, but still middy and organic. You get some really interesting and bizarre sounds putting the acoustic into an amp. There are a few tracks which I might have made a bit more acoustic, ones I did early in the process, before I really settled on the vibe I wanted, but perhaps it was better not to mess with them.'

Relationships with bandmates, musical and personal, are what make or break many acts, and I wondered, after so many years playing with the same people, what Grant was looking for in the musicians he worked with on the solo album, and the subsequent live work...

'I didn't work with anybody on the record apart from Karl Brazil on drums and Paul Beard on keyboards, who has worked with loads of people. Other than that, it was Brian [the engineer] and I who did a few keyboard parts, and I've done bits of percussion and samples. Live, it's people I've met through friends, or who Karl has introduced me to: we've got two Danish guys, one called Nikolai, who also plays with the Specials, who's really good with Rhodes, Wurlitzer, and Hammond tones; and a bass player who also plays keyboards and does backing vocals. Actually Henrik really only plays bass guitar on a couple of tracks. I really wanted a band who were really versatile, so we could be small and portable, but we could still find a variety of tones. I know it's a solo record, but I wanted a band vibe behind it, and I didn't want it to feel like one guy with a bunch of session musicians; I wanted it to feel like Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, or the Band. I wanted them to feel part of it. I might even start calling them the Yorktown Heights; it's got a real chemistry, but it's the sort of band where I might bring in some other players for bigger tours. The drummer is Geoff Lee, who I've known for a while; he came in because Karl was away with Robbie Williams. I don't want the band to be over-rehearsed – not loose, exactly, but certainly still raw. These guys are so good that you can throw a song at them and be doing it really soon after, so it doesn't have to be over-rehearsed.'

Grant Nicholas is clearly quite a driven man, and that focus has led to great success for him, but throughout the interview there are little hints of a very human uncertainty, a need to find a niche for his songs. I asked him what the future held for him, and for the band, but it's obvious he's just thrilled to be doing what he loves after so long in the business.

'I'm planning to return to Feeder, I have written some new stuff for the band, and some songs I wrote for this which I felt fitted Feeder better. The thing is, I want to give this record a good go first, do some touring, and really get it out there for people. We're touring in September and October, more into November, and if that goes well, maybe more touring next year. I love Feeder and I absolutely am planning to go back to that, but I think I'll do this again. The response has been really good on Facebook, only a couple of people not liking it, and I think that's because they're afraid that Feeder are going to disappear. I can write more guitar rock songs, that's what I do, but I hope people will keep an open mind and get into this as well. Maybe I can do more of it.'

Grant Nicholas' Yorktown Heights *is out now. Grant tours the UK throughout September and October. For more info and to buy tickets, visit:* ***www.grantnicholas.net***

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OLIVERI'S ARMY

Sometime Queens Of The Stone Age and Dwarves bassist Nick Oliveri returns on acoustic guitar. We meet the former bad (very bad) boy...

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER

You may or may not be a fan of the heavy rock and punk produced by Nick Oliveri's former bands Queens Of The Stone Age, Dwarves and Mondo Generator (plus the small matter of stoner-rock legends Kyuss and their recent partial reunion, Kyuss Lives) but there's one thing Oliveri has in his favour. No other musician in these hallowed pages have ever been subject to a standoff outside his or her home, involving a SWAT team and innumerable police officers...

'Fortunately that's all behind me now,' says Oliveri, in the midst of a UK tour when *Acoustic* meets him for a chat. Indeed, the aftermath of the 2011 incident – after which Oliveri was arrested on suspicion of domestic violence, and the cops found drugs and weapons in his house – has just come to an end. 'My three-year probation period was dismissed early for good behaviour,' he adds, with evident relief. 'I fulfilled all my obligations and kept my nose clean, so to speak. I wanted to put it behind me and I've now got five bands to keep me out of trouble!'

> *"I'm using a Hofner, it's a beautiful guitar. It's fun to go out and do acoustic. I don't get to do it that often..."*

How have Oliveri's fans, most of whom will only know of him through the relentlessly heavy music of Kyuss and QOTSA, been reacting to his return on acoustic, we ask? 'It's been good!' he tells us. 'People are into the intimacy of the shows. I'm better at bass than guitar, but I get a lot out of both instruments, so it's great. We're doing all kinds of good stuff out here. It's fun to go out and do acoustic; I don't get to do it that often, so I'm enjoying it.'

What guitars is Oliveri using? 'I'm using a Hofner, it's a beautiful guitar,' he says, brightening up noticeably. 'They sponsored me on this tour. It's a solid instrument, which is good because I play real hard. I also have a Maton, which is now my backup after having been my main guitar for years. It's been through hell and back! The sides have been busted and everything, but I've written so many songs on it that I wanted to keep it, so I fixed the sides with cardboard and tape. Then the headstock got knocked all the way off of it in Portland, Oregon, a while back, so I got it fixed back on with glue, a metal bracket and screws – and actually it stays in tune better than ever now, because the screws are stronger than the original wood. I got the Maton back in 2002 when Queens were doing some acoustic shows down in Australia: I played a bunch of Matons and this was the best one.'

Oliveri has an album called *Leave Me Alone* out in September, and a single called 'Human Cannonball Explodes' is now available via iTunes. Asked about the inspiration for the song, Nick makes it clear that his annoying-the-FBI days may be over but that his life is far from tranquil.

'It was a late night, and I'd been recording drums on this record,' he explains. 'I was kinda tired, I guess, and I fell asleep when I was driving home from Los Angeles to Palm Springs. I was driving my Mercedes SLK 430 and I rolled it. Luckily it was a hardtop: I smacked my head on the concrete, but fortunately that was all.'

'I lost my car but I kept my legs, so I'm pretty lucky on that one,' he concludes.

We couldn't agree more. Let's hope he takes the bus next time.

'Human Cannonball Explodes' *is out now. For more info, visit their Facebook page:* ***www.facebook.com/officialmondogenerator***

SAM PALLADIO

Swapping the Cornish countryside for Tennessee, Sam Palladio has made his name starring in TV's hit show ***Nashville***, ***Runner Runner*** *alongside Justin Timberlake, and with Matt LeBlanc in* ***Episodes*** *– but his sights are also set on his own music. We chat to him about buying guitars in Music City, writing music on the set of* ***Nashville***, *and having the Grand Ole Opry as a second home.*

WORDS: GUY LITTLE IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Just before the *Nashville* cast is recalled to Tennessee to start filming season three of the hit US musical show, one of the stars, Sam Palladio, is taking a couple of days out in the UK capital to make a rare appearance on stage at The Borderline with country duo (and *Nashville* songwriters) Striking Matches. Having played The Grand Ole Opry more often than some of country music's biggest stars (12 times in total), Sam – who plays aspiring musician Gunnar in *Nashville* – is no stranger to the stage and admits that the last time he played London was to "about eight people in King's Cross".

The series features original songs by music heavyweights including T-Bone Burnett and gives Sam the chance to spotlight his talents in his role as a young musician trying to make a living in Music City. Before flying to Tennessee to film the pilot of the show, he'd never been to the US; the 27-year-old then became the first actor to be offered a role in the show to star alongside Hayden Panettiere, Connie Britton, and Charles Esten.

Walking into the Gibson Guitar HQ in Soho, London, with his guitar case in hand and dressed in a leather biker jacket, skinny jeans, and boots, he looks more rock star than soap star.

'Whoa,' Sam mutters, nodding his head in approval at the amount of guitars hanging around the studio. 'I've never been in here before; it's amazing,' he says, unbuckling his guitar case. 'I'm off to rehearse with Striking Matches this afternoon before our gig tonight, so I've got the Gibson I'll be using.'

The Gibson he pulls out of his case is a CF-100E – a guitar some of you may have also spotted him using in the show, too, although this one is from his own collection. He's also got a bit of history with Striking Matches as they also found their fame through *Nashville*, writing music for the show, including 'When The Right Ones Comes Along' sung by Sam and his co-star Clare Bowen, who plays Sam's on-screen writing partner Scarlett O'Connor.

'I met Striking Matches in Nashville a couple of years ago filming the show and I got to sing some of their fantastic songs. I was blown away by one of their live shows so we swapped numbers and we started to write music together about a year ago. That was my first taste of the Nashville co-writing thing; I always thought before living there that artists wrote their own songs – I soon realised that's rare these days,' he says.

In a way it's a little ironic because that's exactly what his character, Gunnar, portrays in the show – hooking up with artists and writing songs for other musicians. This draws some similarities between his life on-screen and off – only when he writes off-screen, he'll be keeping the songs.

'Yeah, exactly. It was very important from the beginning that we [the show] painted the right picture. The Nashville co-writing system is that you have artists signed to publishing deals and they throw you into three writing sessions a day and the songs get churned out and shipped off to artists looking for songs for new albums. Our process [with Striking Matches] wasn't writing to get a big country hit – it was writing to get a flavour for how we work together. The whole vibe in Nashville is a very creative one and about having great friendships with musicians.'

Although convincing many US viewers of *Nashville* that he's from their home turf with his southern twang, Sam wasn't fazed by the idea of adopting a southern accent for a major US TV show. Although it's something he's asked by many fans and journalists alike, he laughs a little when I say no one has a clue he's from the UK.

'I went to Rose Bruford college for three years and my final project was the play *Orpheus Descending* [Tennessee Williams] which is set in the south of the US, and we had a great dialect coach for that. I spent two months of my final year working on a southern accent and getting all my notes down and doing the phonetics of it all. Time passed and then I graduated, had four years of working doing theatre, TV, and musicals, and so when the audition came through for *Nashville* I felt quite comfortable working in an American accent. At the time they hadn't specified where my character was from, so I auditioned in a general American accent and then it wasn't until two days before I flew out there when

they said, "Oh, he's from Texas." I pulled out all my old notes from college and worked on my, er, twang,' he says in a southern drawl. 'I think it's fantastic living in the city. I'm fortunate enough to have a musical ear – and I think accents are very musical. I can hear all these southerners around town in the bars and clubs and I have a lot of southern friends now – you just absorb it. I think my accent has gotten stronger since I started the show. I watch the first few episodes of season one and then I'll watch the end of season two and think, "Ah, my accent is definitely better!"'

Sam's big break in *Nashville* wasn't the product of an arduous line of auditions and script readings. After being turned down for a role in the Coen Brothers' film *Inside Lewellyn Davis*, and with another job offer on the table which would have taken him to Siberia, Sam went from filming a video in his flat to working with one of the world's biggest TV production companies in less than a fortnight.

'The first script I was sent was *Inside Lewellyn Davis* by the Coen Brothers which I thought was amazing because I'm a huge Coen Brothers fan. I did some auditions for that and sent them a couple of videos of me playing guitar and singing some James Taylor tunes, and that didn't go anywhere, but this second job was ABC's *Nashville*. I read the script, thought it was great – as well as an awesome way to combine my two passions – but it was a big US production company and I'd never even been to America, so I thought I'd not have a chance but I'd give it a try anyway. I put myself on tape in my bedroom with a webcam at about 4am in the morning. I thought I'd do the work, but I wasn't going to kill myself over it because I thought it'd never happen – they were looking for a country singer, you know? So I sent this tape off and then three days later I got the call to say that ABC really liked the audition tape, but asked that I redo it because of the quality,' he laughs. 'So we reshot the scenes, included bits from the Coen Brothers audition tapes of me playing James Taylor as a bit extra, and then some bits from YouTube of me playing my own songs, and then we sent this little package off. At the same time as this, I had another job offer, which was going to take me to Siberia. I was really excited about that but suddenly this offer came back for *Nashville*. I'd never been to the States, never met anyone from the show, didn't have any phone conversations with casting directors or anything – I was just offered the job, and I was the first person to be cast in the show. I had this ridiculously fateful audition process and then they just flew me to Nashville but I felt like I had a lot to prove because they'd taken this chance on me.'

> *"I'm in love with music from the 1970s. CSNY, Simon & Garfunkel, Neil Young... But because of the show, I had to do my homework on country music."*

Although Sam claims he's a little indecisive about which passion he feels he should focus on the most, he shuns the idea quickly and says that just about every job he's had has involved some form of music and that music and acting will always go hand-in-hand for him. As well as writing his own music and filming *Nashville*, he's been working on the new animated Disney picture voicing one of the characters for their next big musical film, *Primrose*.

'I've been working on it for about a year now, and it stars Alan Cumming and Rachel Evan Wood. It'll be out at some point in 2015. I sing some Elvis songs that merge into a Beyoncé tune with the female lead; Frankie Valli merges into Kelly Clarkson – a load of mash-ups. I think I learned my stagecraft by playing in bands as a kid. I didn't actually study theatre until I was at college – I wanted to be a marine biologist up until I was around 16 or 17! I loved music and was playing in bands from 13, so I was always learning how to work an audience from then.'

'I'm also off to Memphis soon to film and present a BBC radio show and documentary about Elvis, which is going to be amazing. I found out that the first time he was on at the Opry they thought he was terrible and they paid him six bucks to leave because it wasn't what the Opry wanted to see. To think that playing the Opry is something I've done is incredible. They [The Opry] called me and told me to look at future gig dates and see if there were are any I'd like to play. I seen that Hunter [Hayes, Grammy nominated country star] was gigging there, so I asked if I could play that date.'

A jack-of-all-trades muso having self-taught every instrument he plays, Sam is a deft guitar player, but also a bass player and drummer – you'll notice he plays the latter in *Nashville*, too. He's also studying classical piano at Belmont School of Music in Nashville in his spare time.

'I guess I'm still trying to do new things. It'd be great to get a bit more music theory going, too, which is why I've started the piano lessons. In Nashville, the musicianship is so strong that it does make you up your game. I can go to see a band every single night and they'll pretty much be faultless shows and every show will be better than the next and you'll be like, "Man, how do they do it?" So it does make me want to develop my playing all the time. I can play my guitar in a pub in London and strum some chords and get away with it if I'm a little out of time, but you really stand out if you do that in Nashville because you know the audience is probably going to be musicians.'

While the guitar voicings aren't played by the actors on *Nashville* – despite the cast members also being musicians – they do learn every song so that it's an authentic representation of the chord patterns, picking patterns and shapes. Canadian record producer and guitar player Colin Linden voices all the guitar parts for Sam and teaches him the techniques for shooting the scenes each week.

'Colin's like the show's guitar mentor. When we come to shoot the scenes we learn the songs because we are all musicians ourselves and we want to learn them exactly as they're recorded. He plays with me out in the real world when I do shows, too. It means that each week or so we're learning a new song and some new technique and fingerpicking pattern that I didn't know the week before. The music team is always trying to find the best music they can for us to play.'

So when you're out in Nashville, you must get people coming up to you handing you CDs with the hope you'll get their songs on the show? 'Yeah, a bit. Unfortunately there's nothing I can do about that. I take some CDs and listen to them, but I don't have any say over what they use or not – and I'm trying to get my own songs on to the show,' he laughs. 'There are a lot of songs I've written with Striking Matches that are close to being used on the show.'

Before chatting to Sam, I had quite an idealistic view of what happens on the set of *Nashville*. I wanted to think that all the cast members sat around together waiting to shoot scenes writing music together, going out and drinking beers on Music Row... Turns out they do just that. Although, in another TV-show-cum-real-life parallel, Sam's character Gunnar co-writes a song with Jay DeMarcus from huge country crooners Rascal Flatts in one of the show's episodes. Obviously, this then turned into Sam doing the same thing in real life.

Gibson

'Yeah, so the scene happened and then in the downtime while we were sitting around after filming, and having a bunch of guitars around, I started playing a riff to one of my old songs and he [DeMarcus] turned to me and said, "Hey, that's really cool and catchy" so I said, "If you're interested, do you want to tear it apart, use it, and write a song?" We ended up having a writing session and turned this song of mine called 'Water Colours' into a song called 'Black and White' which we'll hopefully demo sometime soon.'

When he was growing up, Sam wasn't a fan of country music, instead favouring and taking inspiration from famed folk singers.

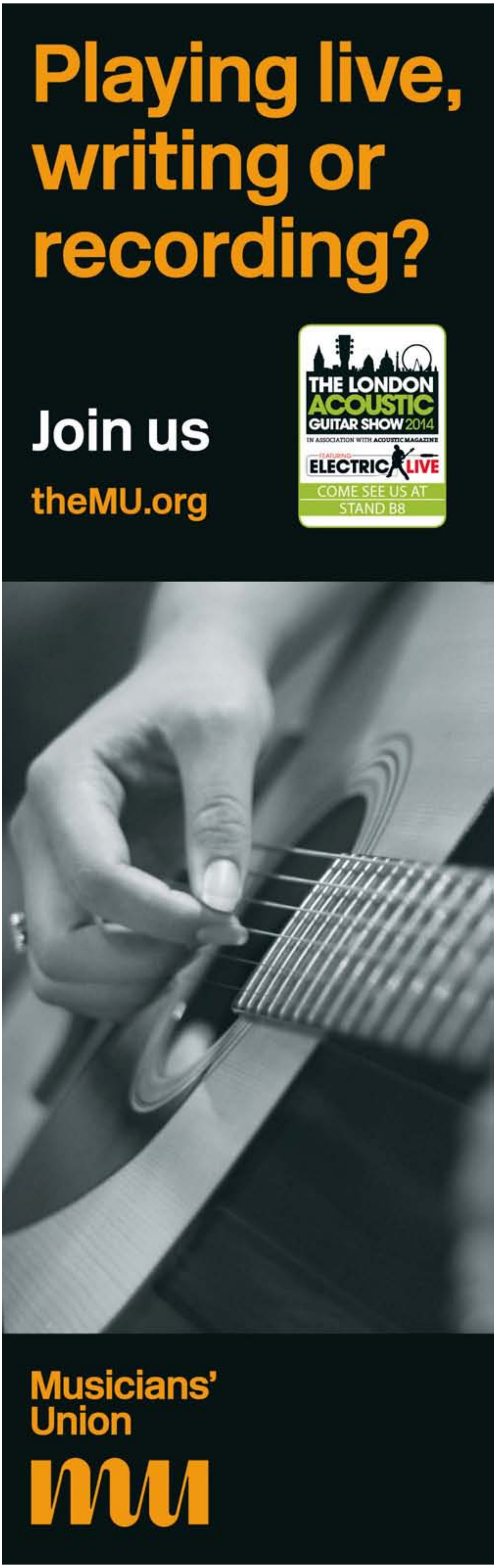
'I love 1970s music – CSNY, Simon & Garfunkel, Neil Young, but because of the show I needed to, and wanted to, be educated on country music. What a cool piece of homework to have, right?'

Although Sam owns an enviable selection of acoustic guitars, he doesn't use his own in the show. The main acoustic Sam's character, Gunnar, uses is the Gibson LG-2. It's no surprise that for gear lovers, *Nashville* is pretty much guitar porn – they even dedicated a whole episode to a pre-war Martin.

'They kind of established that we wouldn't use our own guitars way back in the beginning. Gunnar's prized possession is that Gibson LG-2, but we don't get much of a say in what gear goes onto the show. I really enjoy playing Taylor guitars and I think they're slowly introducing Taylors at the moment, but for all the gear-heads it's great. Danny Rowe is the props master and he deals with all of the guitar companies. When we film a big music scene all the amps and guitars are live; the band you see in the shots are all amazing session musicians. Guitar-wise, it's funny – I used to be happy with one guitar but now I've got about six. For travelling around the country I've got a Taylor GS Mini and a Baby Taylor, which you can put in the overhead compartment of a plane. I've just started to play a Gretsch Country Gentleman now, too, which is beautiful with some flat wound strings on it for that Americana buzz. I've got a Gibson LG-2 American Eagle [the LG-2 he uses in the show is a sunburst finish, his own is a natural finish], and one of the coolest guitars I've got is an old 1940s parlour B&J Serenader. I found it in a vintage guitar store in East Nashville and I just had a pickup put in it because I want to play it live. It sounds really twangy, but great. There is a ridiculous selection of guitars in Nashville and you will find some bargains, but you'd still have to pay a fair whack for a vintage Martin or something. Gruhn's Guitars is amazing; I also buy a lot of gear from this place called Corner Music. They have a big poster that goes around the whole room of artists who've bought gear there and I turned up one day and they had put me up there – right next to Billy Ray Cyrus!'

'All of the songs are together now,' he says of releasing his own album. 'I had a lot of offers to make albums and make EPs in the first year of being on the show, but it's so important that I get the music and the songs right – I don't mind taking my time. I'm in the place right now where I could easily have a six-track EP and then an album, but I'm at the point where I'm making decisions on who might produce an EP or album, who the label will be, and I'm glad I've taken my time because I think it's given me a great selection of songs. People are really eager to see what they're going to get, so it's an exciting period. I would love to get my album out while season three of *Nashville* is airing as there's a great platform there – but slow and steady wins the race. It's exciting being pulled in so many directions and having the time to record is tough to come by, but that's not such a bad problem to have.'

Sam Palladio stars in ABC's Nashville. To keep up-to-date with Sam and his music, follow him on Twitter @SamPalladio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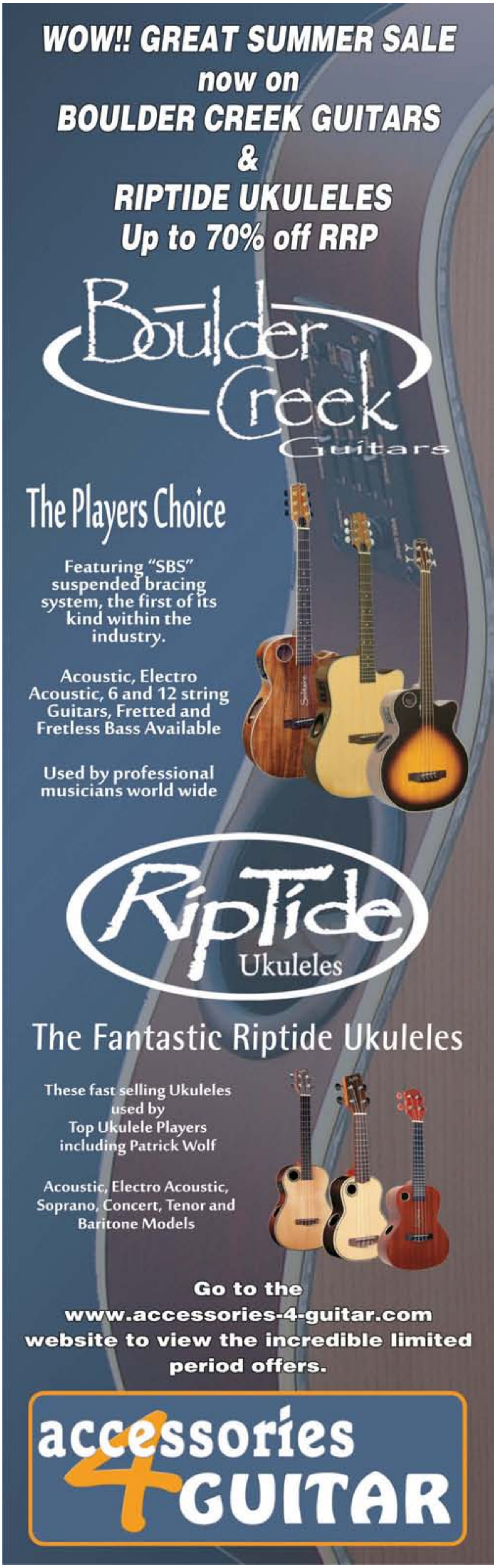
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APP EXTRA
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COLLINGS 0002H

This pair of Collings – 0002H koa and 0002H spruce – rendered reviewer David Mead practically speechless – but at least we know what he wants for Christmas this year!

Both of these guitars were commissioned by acoustic guitar specialists Dave Mann Music of Nottingham. In fact Walter Mann travelled over to Collings HQ in Texas to sit down with Bruce Van Wart – the man responsible for sourcing the timber for Collings guitars – and hand pick the wood in order to create two instruments that are both subtle variations on the company's 0002H model. Needless to say, when this pair arrived at the Acoustic offices it brought things to a complete standstill!

COLLINGS 0002H KOA

The first of this handsome pair is made from koa, a fine exotic wood from Hawaii and promises plenty of the warmth and sweetness associated with this particular timber. Combine that with a small body and the attention to detail for which Collings is famed and you have a very intriguing little package indeed...

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

As you can see from the pictures, this guitar looks absolutely stunning. There's an almost feral look about the koa's grain pattern – wild and richly textured, front and back. But let's not get too carried away; first we'll consider some vital statistics, courtesy of my trusty ruler.

The 0002H's upper bout measures in at 275mm, widening to 380mm at the lower bout via a waist of 235mm. The body length is 509mm with a depth of around 84mm near the neck joint, broadening to 94mm at the tail. It's a pretty petite looking instrument overall, the 12-fret-to-the-body design making it seem even more compact.

As I've mentioned, the top wood – and the back and sides – is Hawaiian koa with a subtle coffee coloured hue and beautifully bookmatched grain pattern. Apparently, if the wood that comes under Bruce Van Wart's scrutiny isn't perfectly quartersawn then Collings reject it; and so this wood really does rank as the very best of the best. In fact, the lack of any over-the-top ornamentation elsewhere on the guitar really does mean that it's the wood itself that takes centre stage, with subtlety the name of the game throughout. It's not as if Collings has reserved the best bit of timber for the instrument's front, either, as the back matches it perfectly in terms of patterning.

Moving away from the body, the neck is Honduras mahogany complete with an ivoroid heel cap and a slotted headstock framed by Waverly tuners. The 0002H's fretboard is black ebony with very discreet mother of pearl position markers at the fifth, seventh and ninth frets.

The ebony bridge is of the vintage pyramid design and the rosette and mock tortoiseshell scratchplate round off the body furnishings to a tee. The guitar's body is bound with a herringbone pattern to the top and is mimicked in the centre strip down the back. The workmanship throughout is up to Collings' well established impeccable level and, as you can imagine, I simply can't wait to pick it up in order to hear what it sounds like!

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

The neck feels substantial in the hand – in fact the instrument kind of whispers "fingerpicker" the minute you pick it up! But in a very polite way, you understand... All the Collings guitars I've played in the past – and I've played a few – have been united in one aspect, sonically speaking, and that's the almost unreal amount of clarity and separation between the notes. You can hear every single note in a chord individually and that's something that makes this old fingerpicker very happy indeed.

Other aspects like sustain and the sweet dynamic range made me smile, too. Koa is somewhat similar to mahogany – at least, it is here anyway – but there are some further subtle nuances on offer, as well. In terms of warmth, there might be a couple of extra notches available over and above what mahogany has to offer and it's honey-sweet, too. It's the kind of instrument that

COLLINGS 0002H

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Collings
Model: 0002H
Retail Price: £5899
Body Size: 000
Made In: USA
Top: Koa
Back and Sides: Hawaiian koa
Neck: Honduras mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 22
Tuners: Waverly
Nut Width: 46mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EJ-16 .012 - .053s
Left Handers: Special order
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: A stunning looker with a honey-sweet tone
Cons: An expensive body wood makes the price too rich for some
Overall: The wood here is the star, with a voice to match – a stunning instrument!

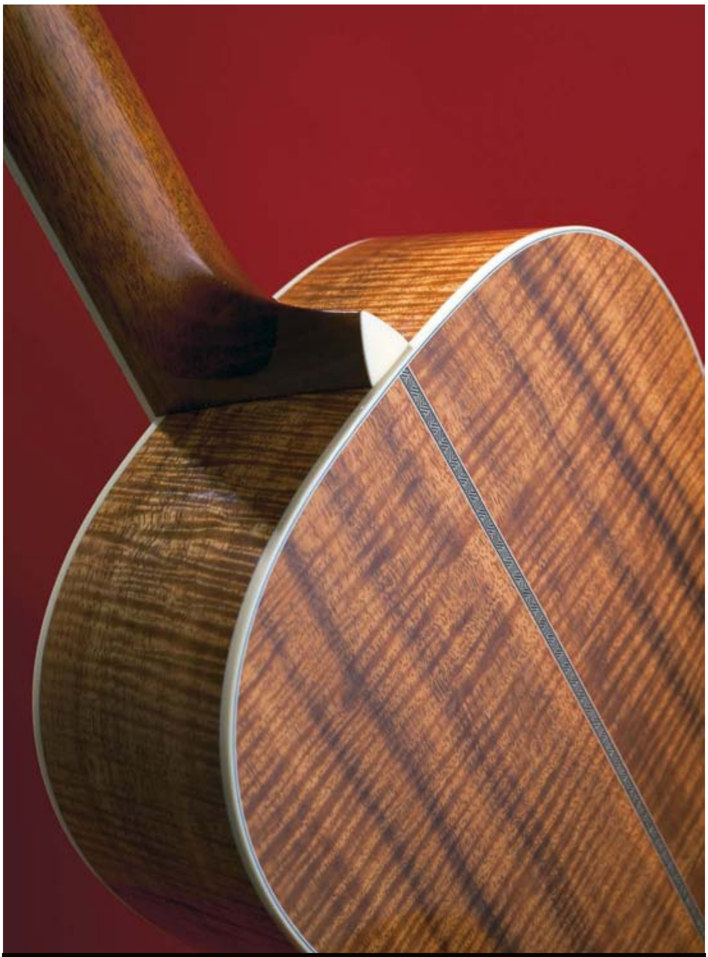
ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality ★★★★★
Sound Quality ★★★★★
Value for Money ★★★★½

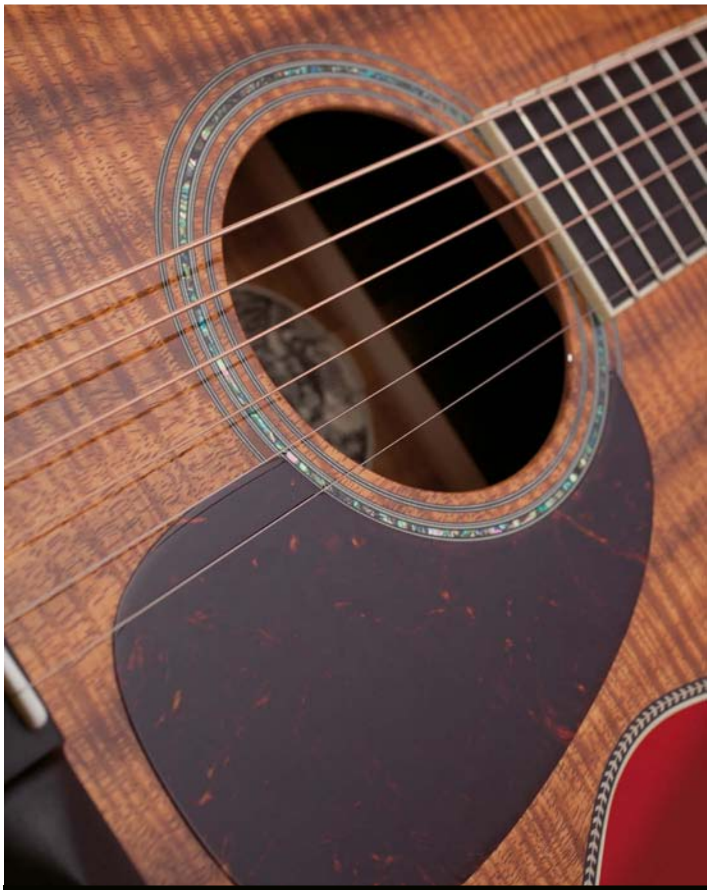
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Collings Guitars / Dave Mann Music
www.davemann.co.uk


The koa 0002H is the better looking with its eye-catching grain pattern

The slotted headstock on both models come adorned with waverly tuners


If buying with eyes we'd go for koa, if buying with ears it'd be the spruce

would record fabulously well as its acoustic voice really is superb with bags of depth, character and a surprising amount of maturity, seeing as it's relatively fresh off the workshop bench.

COLLINGS 0002H SPRUCE

Whereas its partner might have the amazing grain, this 0002H looks far more plain – but I'm told that there's a lot going on under the bonnet and that this particular guitar has been engineered to be something of a fingerpicker's dream. Well, I'm sold – so let's take a closer look…

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

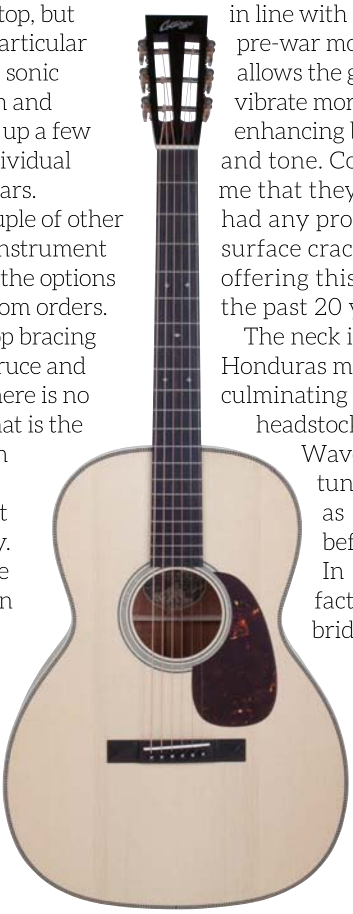
It must be a trick of the eye, but this 0002H looks slightly broader than its koa counterpart. I even subjected it to the caresses of my infamous ruler, but apart from the odd approximation anomaly – which I put down to my not being too precise when wielding the thing – everything measures up as a standard 0002H. Obviously looks can be deceiving!

The top of this instrument is German spruce, currently creamy white with a perfectly bookmatched top and subtle grain – well, practically anything would look subtle with the koa 0002H standing next to it. Everything pretty standard so far, but it's the back and side wood that's the unique factor here. Rather than go for the more standard rosewood or mahogany options, Walter and Bruce decided to go for flamed Spanish cedar. This is a wood that Collings doesn't come across too often, but when Walter visited the factory he was particularly taken with the grain pattern in the sets they had in stock. It's a very light and resonant wood and it will be interesting to see how it partners the spruce a little later on when I put it through its paces. It would be true to say that you're more likely to find

The top of this 0002H is beautifully bookmatched German spruce

cedar as a guitar top, but apparently this particular batch has a set of sonic virtues all its own and Collings snapped up a few sets to use on individual special order guitars.

There are a couple of other features on this instrument which feature in the options available for custom orders. One is that the top bracing is Adirondack spruce and another is that there is no tongue brace – that is the brace underneath the "tongue" of the fretboard as it overlaps the body. Originally, tongue braces were put in place to counter cracks appearing in this part of the guitar's top due to the pull of the strings. However, leaving it out brings the guitar spec more



in line with the preferred pre-war models and allows the guitar's top to vibrate more freely, thus enhancing both volume and tone. Collings assure me that they've never had any problems with surface cracking, despite offering this option for the past 20 years.

The neck is once again Honduras mahogany, culminating in a slotted headstock and Waverly tuners, as before. In fact, the bridge, scratchplate and binding options here are shared between both models. Now for the fun part!

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

Naturally it's impossible to have these two guitars sitting side by side without actually comparing them to one another. The neck on this particular instrument feels thinner than the other by maybe a tad or two. I kept picking one up and then the other just to be sure, but it certainly feels like this one is slightly more slender. Needless to say, it's still a very comfortable fit in the hand – the main thing is to assess what kind of soundscape is available via the unusual pairing of spruce and cedar. Well, if the Koa model whispers "fingerpicker" then this guitar simply screams it! It's a fingerstylist's delight – a monster truck of tone and playability. Once again, that signature Collings clarity comes to the fore, but this time there seems to be more of a treble bias. Where the Koa was literally warm to the touch, here the timbre is brighter and more lively – and I think it might even be louder, too. In general, spruce topped guitars tend to propel the sound further and that seems to be the case here. Casually strummed chords dash enthusiastically out of the soundhole whilst strategic fingerstyle sounds noble and refined with great clarity and roundness, too. I'd be interested to meet this guitar again in a couple of years when the top has opened up as I think it will have moved up a few gears by then.

CONCLUSION

I don't know whether it would be appropriate for me to actually state a preference here as obviously it would be totally subjective and based entirely on my own tastes. But sometimes you make a choice subconsciously and I found myself loving the looks of the koa 0002H, but spending more time playing the spruce-topped model out of pure pleasure. But putting that all aside, these guitars are superb in every sense of the word and underline the need to question your own perceived preferences by trying a few different models before settling on one. If I was buying with my eyes, the koa would win hands down, but if I was buying with my ears, I'd be going home with the spruce! Act quickly – these guitars won't last long. Check the Dave Mann Music website.

David Mead

COLLINGS 0002H

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Technical Specification
Manufacturer: Collings
Model: 0002H
Retail Price: £4999
Body Size: 000
Made In: USA
Top: German spruce
Back and Sides: Spanish flamed cedar
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 22
Tuners: Waverly
Nut Width: 46mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EJ-16 .012 - .053s
Left Handers: Special order
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard case

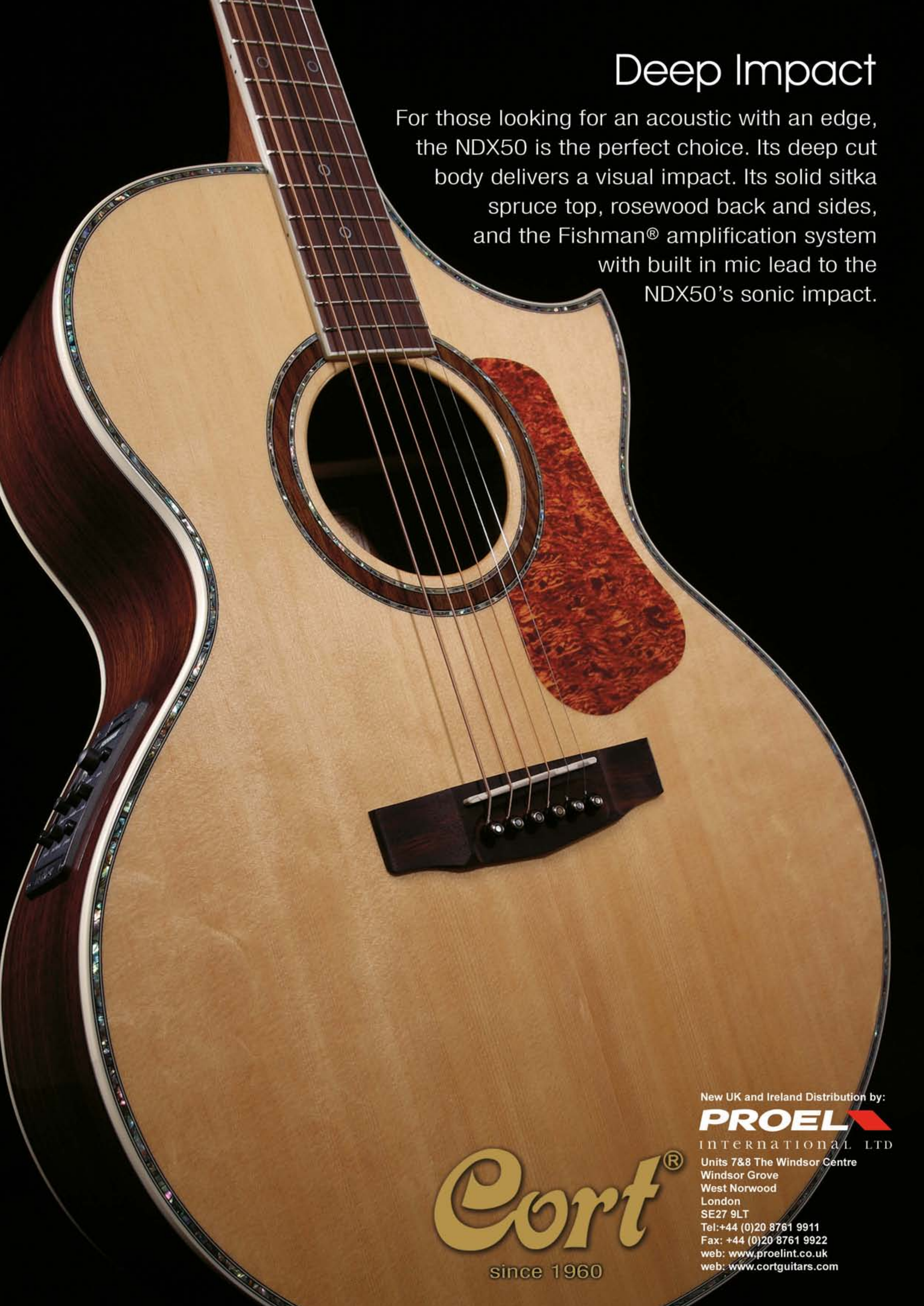
ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Superb fingerstyle guitar – small body, bags of power!
Cons: Too few to mention…
Overall: A guitar that suits the current trend for smaller body shapes with huge tonal engines inside!

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality
Sound Quality
Value for Money

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.



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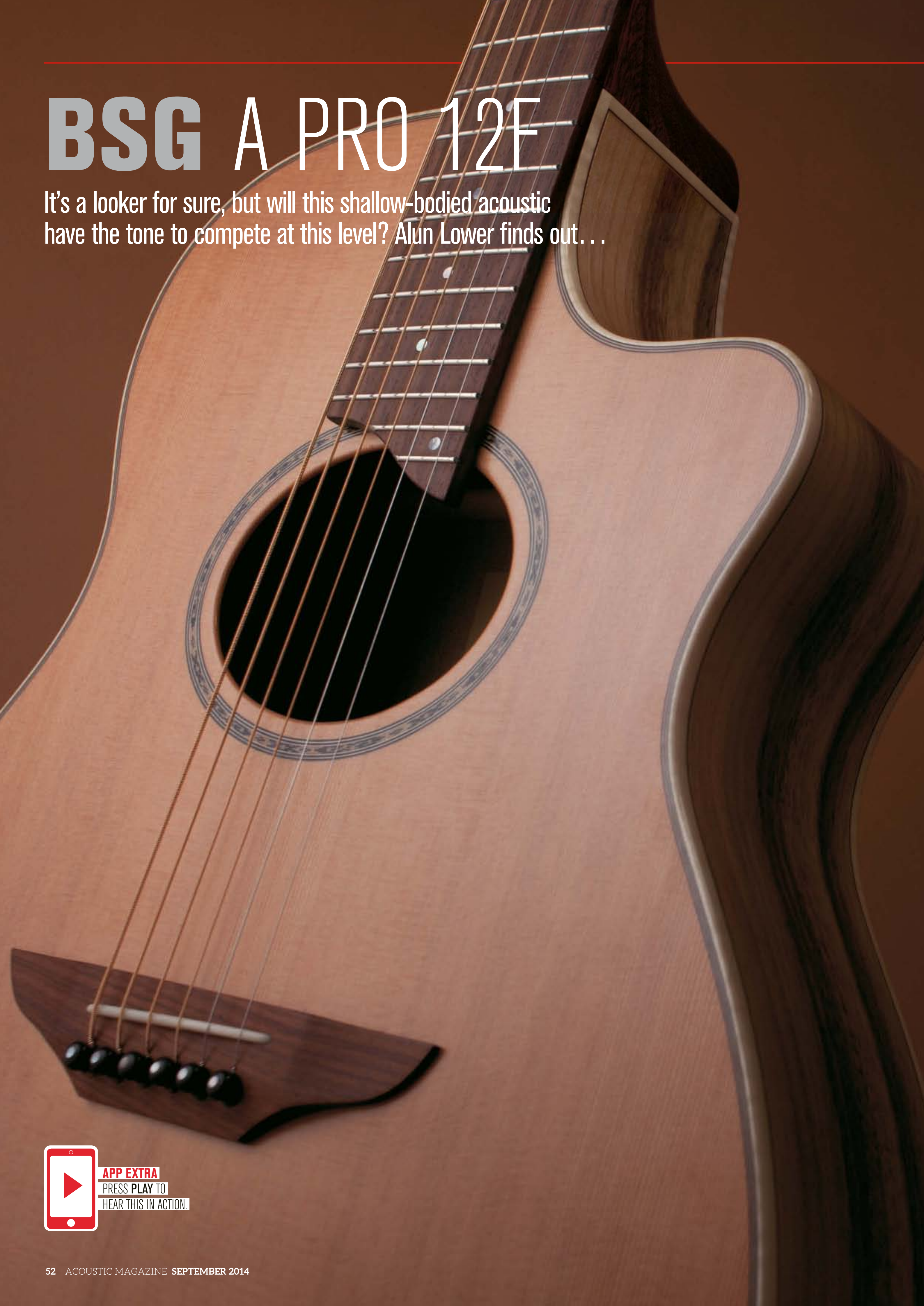
BSG A PRO 12E

It's a looker for sure, but will this shallow-bodied acoustic have the tone to compete at this level? Alun Lower finds out…



APP EXTRA
PRESS PLAY TO HEAR THIS IN ACTION.

Electro-acoustics can be a tricky instrument to get just right, with many builders opting for a shallower body to aid the pickups/microphones in picking up the best tone. The downside of this approach is that many guitarists consider shallow-bodied instruments to have inferior tone – an assumption that is often proved correct. Imagine my surprise then when I first unpacked the BSG A Pro, noted the shallow body size and turned the guitar only to find that there were no electronics at all! As it turns out, the A Pro is indeed designed with electronics in mind, but our supplying retailer in this case (The Music Room) has instead decided to offer the guitars on a purely acoustic basis, with electronics remaining an optional extra. They say genius and madness are two sides of the same coin, so which side has the penny dropped on this occasion? I, for one, am very keen to find out.

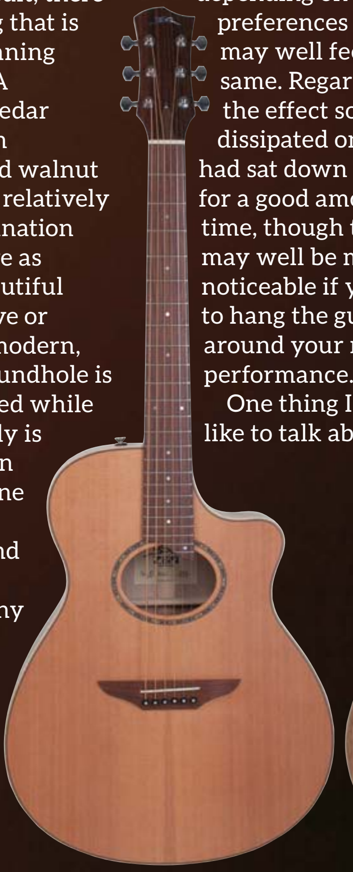
BUILD QUALITY

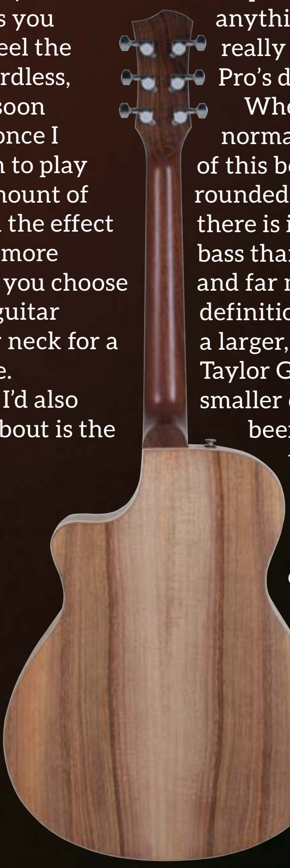
To give BSG its credit, there can be no denying that is one seriously stunning guitar to behold. A gorgeous golden cedar top sits proudly on beautifully figured walnut back and sides – a relatively uncommon combination that strikes the eye as both bold and beautiful but never excessive or overly ornate. A modern, slightly oblong soundhole is tastefully decorated while the rest of the body is bound primarily in rosewood, with fine accents of ebony and maple here and there.

A solid mahogany neck contrasts elegantly against the paler body woods and is further decorated by rosewood veneers across the heel cap and the back of the headstock. The face of the headstock features an ebony veneer, matching the Macassar ebony used for the immaculately crafted fingerboard and bridge. It might sound like a daft thing to say when dealing with acoustic guitars but it's a very "woody" look, implemented in a truly artistic way where the natural hue and grain of the woods used says far more than a brushstroke ever could. Everything is neat yet gloriously detailed, making for a true harmony of design that really is a wonder to behold.

The one downside of the construction that I can see is that the slimline body coupled with a fairly heavy neck seemed to create a little bit of imbalance, with the guitar tipping even more easily than I would normally expect from an acoustic. It's possible that I'm noticing the difference much more dramatically than it really is, but I definitely felt that something was different compared to other guitars I've reviewed recently, and depending on your own preferences you may well feel the same. Regardless, the effect soon dissipated once I had sat down to play for a good amount of time, though the effect may well be more noticeable if you choose to hang the guitar around your neck for a performance.

One thing I'd also like to talk about is the decision to strip this guitar of any electronics. It's clear from both the BSG and The Music Room websites that this guitar was originally conceived as an electro, hence the decision to thin out the body. To take that functionality away obviously makes a saving on cost that can be passed on to the consumer, but to supply the guitar to *Acoustic* in this state makes me feel like I've really only got half a guitar to review. The Music Room makes it abundantly clear that an electronics package can be added on at the point of purchase, but it's still something to consider if you're intending to go down a purely acoustic route.





SOUND QUALITY

The effects of the shallow body profile can be immediately heard upon playing, and I have to confess to actually being a little surprised and disappointed with my first few tentative strums. However, after extended play I think I have to put this down to being presented with something unexpected more than anything else, as I've grown really rather fond of the A Pro's distinctive voice.

Where you would normally expect a guitar of this body shape to have a rounded, all-purpose voice, there is initially much less bass than you would expect and far more projection and definition. It's almost like a larger, richer version of a Taylor GS Mini, where the smaller dimensions have been used to enhance the clarity of the "speaker", as it were. Anyone that has tried (or indeed owns) one of these guitars will know just how addictive that tone can be, and chances are you'll like it even more when it's pouring out of the A Pro. Definition and clarity really is the order of the day, with crisp low end notes blending perfectly with the sparkling highs, all backed up by a decent push of mid that manages not to muddy up when you apply a bit of pressure with your attack.

The A Pro seems to respond particularly well to fingerpicking, as the definition of those lower strings makes sure that every nuance of a complex arrangement can be heard clearly. You don't get the thump in your chest

BSG A PRO 12F

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: BSG
Model: A Pro 12F Walnut
Retail Price: £1,200
Body Size: Jumbo cutaway
Made In: Czech Republic
Top: Cedar
Back and Sides: Figured walnut
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Macassar Ebony
Frets: 24
Tuners: Gotoh
Nut: 44.5mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Electronics: No
Strings Fitted: High quality USA-made
Left Handers: N/A
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hardcase

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Superbly designed and manufactured with a great price to boot and awesome projection
Cons: No electronics makes us feel a little underwhelmed and wondering "what if" – but this is an optional upgrade
Overall: Really is a great guitar at the price point, and it's flawless looks will certainly turn heads

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality	✪✪✪✪
Value for Money	✪✪✪✪

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

The Music Room
www.themusicroom-online.co.uk

BSG is an exciting and talented company which is destined for great things

The A Pro is one of the most superbly designed guitars at this price point

that you'd get from a thicker-voiced guitar however, which could limit the guitar's versatility in the eyes of some potential buyers.

Strumming also works well, and again that balance across the strings is exceptional, offering plenty of rich harmonics from those utterly sumptuous tonewoods. From this point of view the A Pro probably wouldn't make the ideal solo instrument purely because you wouldn't have the benefit of other instruments filling in the extra frequencies. At the same time, I feel that this argument would become redundant if the electronics package was good enough, as you could simply dial in the exact tone you require.

CONCLUSION

No doubt this review sounds something of a mixed bag, and to a certain extent it is. I can't help but feel frustrated that I haven't been able to sample the "full experience" that an electronics package would provide, and everything I love about the A Pro points towards it being an absolutely incredible electro-acoustic, once upgraded. I can only judge on what I have in front of me, however, and in that regard I feel like I am playing a guitar that is undoubtedly excellent, but falls just shy of brilliance.

For the purely acoustic option, the modern fingerpicker will be hard-pressed to find a guitar more expertly tuned to their requirements. The A Pro really is that good and I would suggest adding an extra star onto the end of this review if you're even remotely inclined to leave your pick sat on the coffee table for any period of time. For singer-songwriters, all-rounders and those in search of a sublime do-it-all acoustic, there's a chance (however small) that the A Pro may fall just short of your expectations unless you opt for those tasty upgrades. If that sounds like you then it's probably best that you give the A Pro a test run before you make a blind purchase.

With the BSG A Pro 12 F clarity and definition really is the order of the day

One thing that can't be denied is that the A Pro is one of the most superbly designed and manufactured guitars I have ever tried at this price point. Truly – it is superb. From this example, BSG is an exciting and talented company that is destined for great things.

Alun Lower

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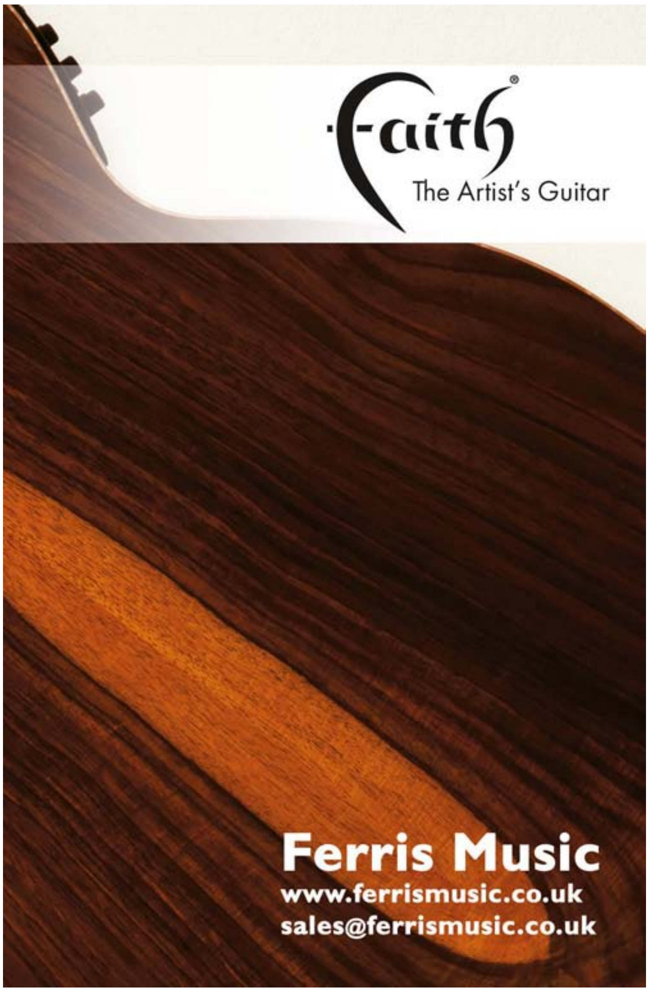
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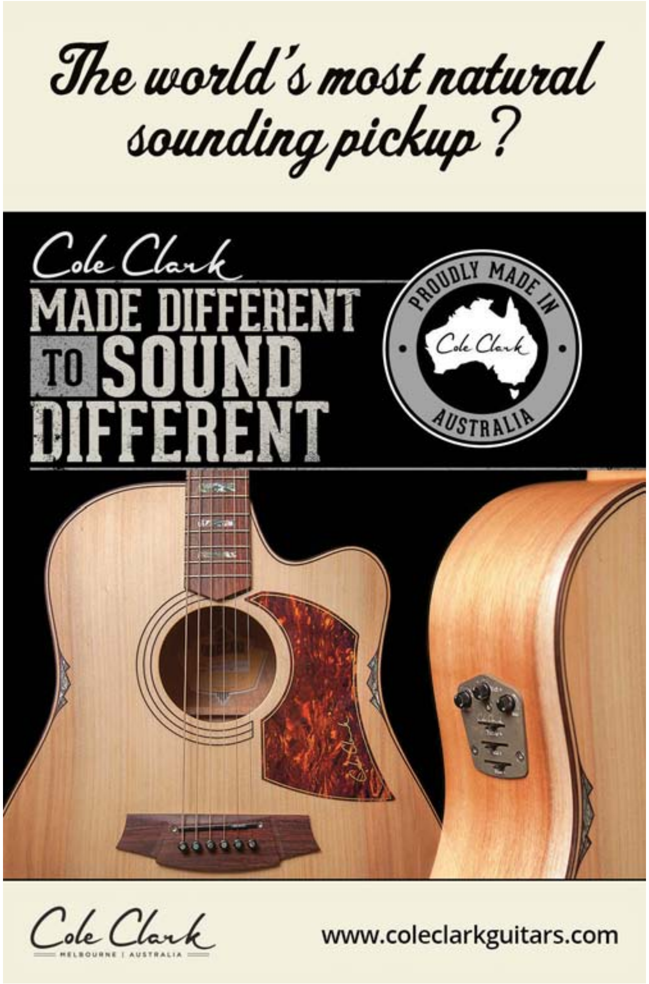
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TAYLOR GS MINI

Take a fully sized Taylor Grand Symphony, shrink it down to munchkin size and what have you got? David Mead is on a mission to find out…

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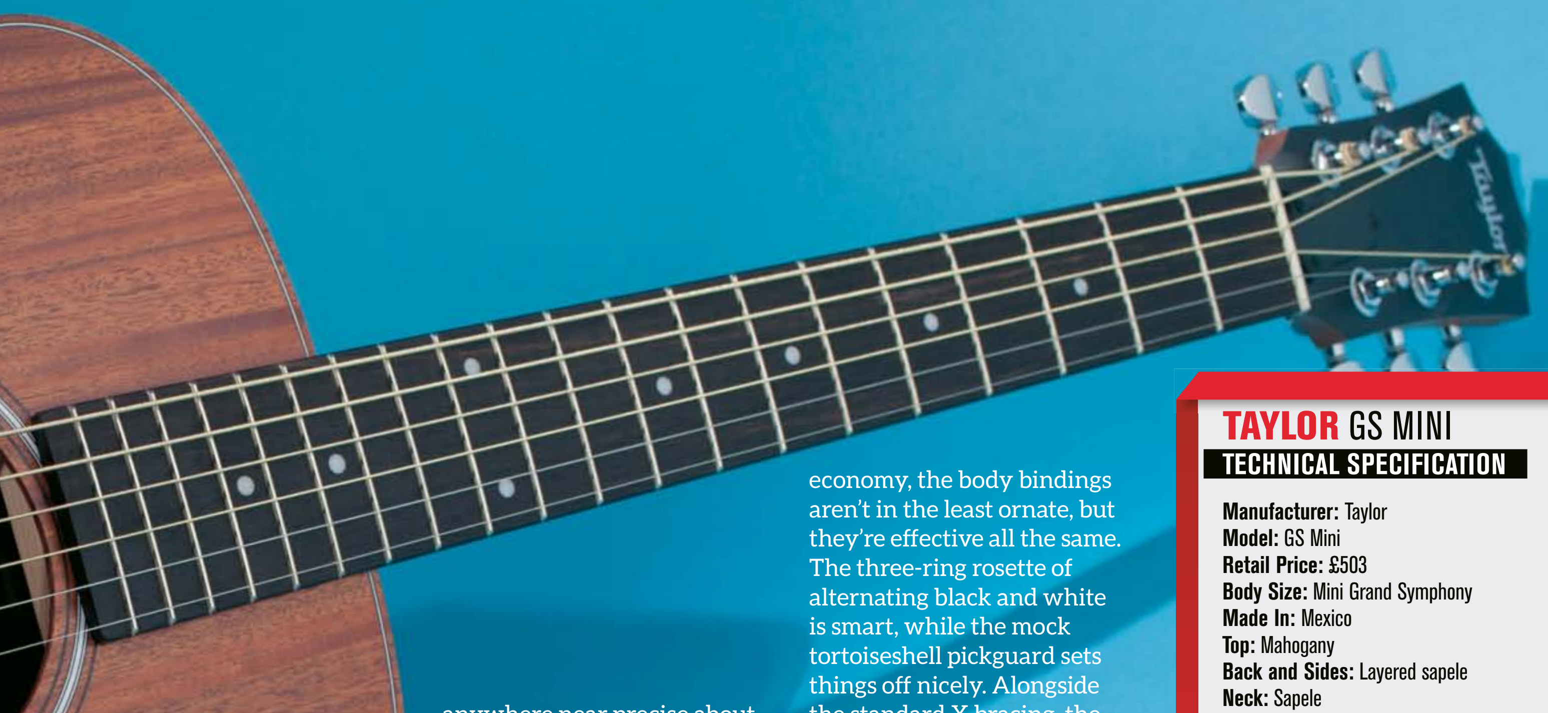
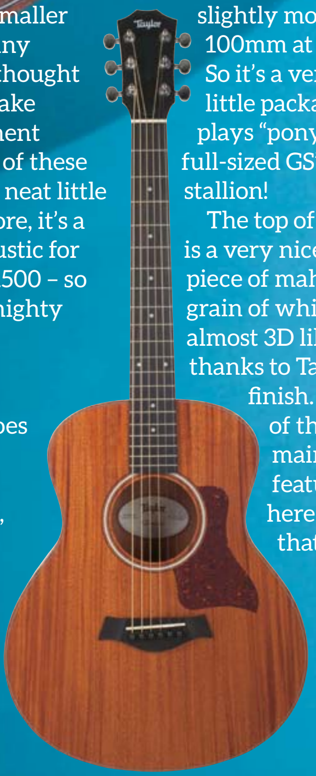
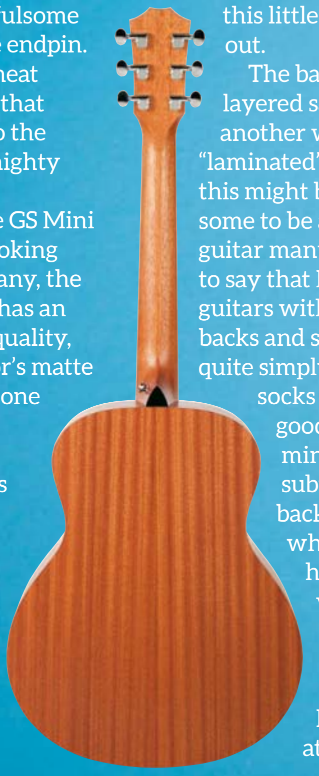


The Taylor GS Mini has been around for a few years now, but with the sudden surge in interest in both smaller bodied and mahogany topped guitars, we thought that it was time to take a look at an instrument that combines both of these features into a very neat little package. Furthermore, it's a genuine Taylor acoustic for just a smidge over £500 – so let's see what this mighty mite has to offer…

BUILD QUALITY

So where exactly does the GS Mini fit in to the Taylor acoustic guitar family? Well, obviously it's a lot smaller than the Grand Symphony, but it's also bigger than a Baby Taylor. There's only one way we're going to be anywhere near precise about this, so pardon me while I wield my measuring apparatus. At a very stylish 256mm on the upper bout and 366mm on the lower, you can tell that we're almost in parlour territory. The waist thins down to a trim 226mm and the depth varies from 82mm at the neck to a slightly more fulsome 100mm at the endpin. So it's a very neat little package that plays "pony" to the full-sized GS's mighty stallion!





The top of the GS Mini is a very nice looking piece of mahogany, the grain of which has an almost 3D like quality, thanks to Taylor's matte finish. As one of the main features here is that of economy, the body bindings aren't in the least ornate, but they're effective all the same. The three-ring rosette of alternating black and white is smart, while the mock tortoiseshell pickguard sets things off nicely. Alongside the standard X bracing, the top's underside features Taylor's "relief rout" which is a groove cut along the top's inner edges and has the effect of loosening it up to increase the guitar's bass response and general volume. This has been a feature on all Taylors since 2002 and it's good to find that this little fella didn't miss out.

The back and sides are layered sapele, which is another way of saying "laminated", but whereas this might be considered by some to be a dirty word in guitar manufacture I have to say that I've played some guitars with laminated backs and sides that have quite simply blown my socks off and so it's good to keep an open mind. There's a subtle "bowl" to the back of the guitar, which is doubtless here to help with volume and projection. It's been very nicely done and adds a lot of character at the same time.

TAYLOR GS MINI

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Taylor
Model: GS Mini
Retail Price: £503
Body Size: Mini Grand Symphony
Made In: Mexico
Top: Mahogany
Back and Sides: Layered sapele
Neck: Sapele
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Die-cast chrome
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 596mm
Onboard Electronics: Optional ES-Go Ready
Strings Fitted: Elixir Phosphor Bronze .012s
Left Handers: Yes, no extra cost
Gig Bag/Case Included: GS Mini hard bag

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Taylor quality with a full-bodied tone, wrapped in a little bundle!
Cons: My only gripe was that the action was a mite too high for me
Overall: Taylor has pulled out all the stops to give this mini guitar such a superstar sound

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★★
Sound Quality	★★★★½
Value for Money	★★★★½

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Taylor Guitars
www.taylorguitars.com

It's a genuine Taylor guitar for just a smidge over £500 – what's not to like?

The nut width is the same as many other guitars – you'll feel at home here

Despite the fact that this might be considered a "budget" Taylor, it's certainly not short on features.

The GS's neck is once again sapele and could easily be mistaken for mahogany if you weren't paying attention. There's a separate heel and the headstock has been scarfed on – almost invisibly, it has to be said.

There are six unbranded tuners on the sides of the headstock, which is itself faced with Lexan, a polycarbonate resin that has a textured surface and which is very slightly rough to the touch. On to the fingerboard and it's ebony all the way – another hint of luxury on a guitar in this price range. The nut and string saddle are both Nubone, the latter sitting amid an ebony bridge.

SOUND QUALITY

It's always difficult to know exactly what is reasonable to expect from a mini acoustic in terms of volume and tone. You'd be asking a lot if you anticipated anything like the sound of a full body, for instance. On the other hand, "scaling down" is all well and good, but you wouldn't want the guitar's voice to be compromised along the way. I can tell you that the GS Mini is a real eyebrow raiser, in terms of the sound it produces.

I was genuinely quite amazed by how much volume and very usable tone was springing forth from this little chap. Furthermore, it's a very comfortable instrument to sit and play, which isn't always the case with a "mini me" edition. The neck is very user-friendly; it's broader than you expect, but not in any way chunky and the nut width is the same standard that you would find on thousands of instruments out there. So you're immediately at home and not forced into a change of playing style to suit the guitar's diminutive size. This makes it a nigh on perfect travel guitar – I wouldn't imagine that there's an airline that would put up any serious resistance to carrying the GS Mini on board as hand luggage.

Chords ring out with some considerable sustain and single notes are very well catered for as well. The instrument might be slight, but there's certainly nothing lacking when it comes to performance.

Another feature I like a lot is one that is practically hidden from view. If you look through the soundhole, towards the neck joint, you'll see a plastic fitting into which you can slot Taylor's ES-Go passive soundhole pickup. It simply slides in, from what I can gather (there wasn't one supplied with our review sample). Then you merely unscrew the endpin and replace it with the jack socket which shares the same shape and screw fittings. Simple. A true do-it-yourself pick-up fix! I believe that the ES-Go is available for around £100 and so you could have stage-ready Taylor – with a more than reasonable set of larynx – for around £600, which isn't at all bad.

CONCLUSION

Despite having some other toys to play with this month, I have to confess that I kept coming back to the Taylor GS-Mini for its 100% fun factor. There's something about playing a smaller body guitar with a surprisingly full sound that appeals to me and I suspect that in that I am not alone. I'm inclined to think that I would be more than happy to gig this guitar as I suspect that its amplified voice would be mature and fully workable in a live scenario with the ES-Go.

If a mahogany top is not particularly your cup of tea then it's available in a Sitka spruce/sapele combo or even a slightly more exotic Hawaiian Koa/Koa variation. But whatever your tastes in timber, if you're looking for a small body guitar for either travel, fun or even serious playing, don't give the GS-Mini a miss, because it really is a corker.

David Mead

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Body depth:65mm
Overall length:603mm

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Tenor £99.00
Scale length:432mm
Body depth:70mm
Overall length:656mm

Baritone £110.00
Scale length:515mm
Body depth:80mm
Overall length:754mm

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Curly Koa body, bound fingerboard. Abalone rosette, Fitted with Aquila Strings. Padded bag

Concert £179.00
Scale length:382mm
Body depth:65mm
Overall length:603mm

Tenor £189.00
Scale length:432mm
Body depth:70mm
Overall length:656mm

Baritone £209.00
Scale length:515mm
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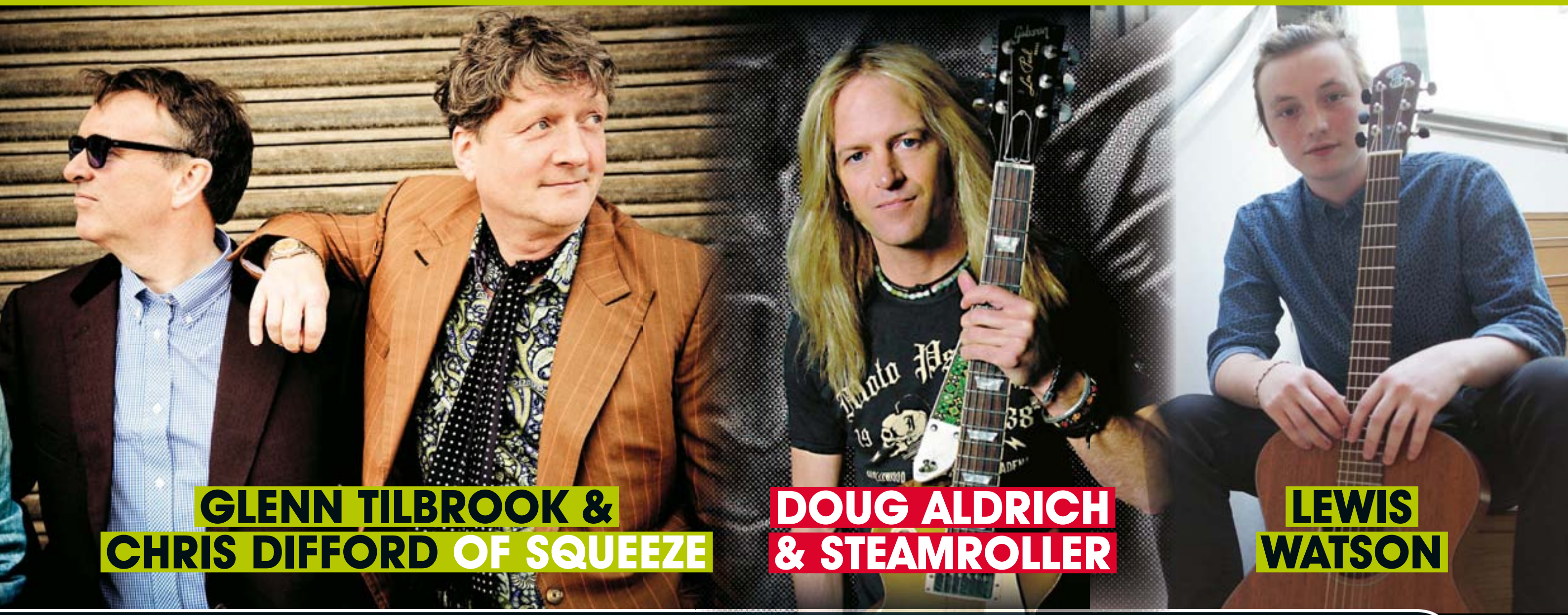

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ANDREW WHITE

Custom guitar titan The North American Guitar takes on another range of Far East-made acoustics with a luthier-built mentality. Guy Little meets two Andrew White production models with two very different players in mind...

The North American Guitar really needs no intro. In a short space of time they've become the UK's foremost authority on custom-built guitars. Stocking some of the world's finest work from Patrick James Eggle, Michael Millard (Froggy Bottom), Michael Greenfiled and others, it's not just tonal nirvana in their London showroom, it's outright guitar heaven. Recently, though, The North American Guitar has been rethinking a few things – namely being that if you're not earning big (big!) bucks, you're not likely to find anything inside their walls that you'll realistically be able to take home with you. (Although, I must mention that they're now offering a finance package to help you make your dream guitar become that little bit more affordable.) Without wanting to stock guitars that aren't the best they can find, they had a bit of a challenge on their hands – sourcing instruments which are sub (or thereabouts) £1,000 and which are also subject to the designs of a discerning luthier. You may recall we looked at TNAG's first foray into this market a couple of issues ago with their Bashkin-cum-Fleishman Avian range. In a similar vein, and with exclusive European distribution rights, this is where we meet Andrew White via The North American Guitar.

Andrew is a revered American luthier who hand builds world class instruments for players across the globe, notably James Valentine of Maroon 5. His "signature series" (handmade USA models) are known for their tight waists and alluring aesthetics and reach the upper echelon of price brackets – try $10,000 for size, huh? His "luthier's collection" (also handmade in the USA) experiments with new string configurations, asymmetric bridges, custom soundhole options and fanned frets – kind of redefining the "signature series" into something that's somewhat experimental.

The North American Guitar recognised his prowess as a famed luthier and started talking about his range of production guitars made from all solid woods in Korea and how to bring these to Europe with a price tag that doesn't require you to be in one of the world's biggest pop bands in order to afford one.

Andrew White recently joined forces with Artec Sound, a Korean guitar and accessories manufacturer, to open a new factory designed to make tens of thousands of guitars – a huge step away from the 20 a year or so he makes himself. In Andrew White's range of production guitars, he's developed three body shapes (each original, and not a re-working) that make up the Goddess Series: Cybele, Freja, and Eos. What we're looking at today is the Cybele 100J and the Freja 112. The production guitars aim to share the many years of experience Andrew White has gained building custom acoustics in the USA and transfer this to a Korean factory and workforce.

CYBELE 100J

BUILD QUALITY

The Cybele 100J makes a statement without even realising it. On first glance, you'd be forgiven if you thought this was an all-mahogany guitar. It is, in fact, all-solid Jatoba wood. Jatoba is a wood sometimes referred to as Brazilian cherry and it does have the appearance of a lovely slab of mahogany. Anyway, the piece we've got here really is attractive, offset with the black binding beautifully. It's a new one for me, so we'll discover how it sounds in a little while.

There's an elephant in the room – the body shape. It's a completely unique design of Andrew's which is a little difficult to place. Its tight waist means it's a comfortable guitar to sit with, but if I had to compare it to another more "known" body shape, I'd have to put it somewhere in the parlour camp. It's a small guitar – a little reminiscent of something you may see a certain ginger songwriter wielding. It's got a big lower bout, which will no doubt contribute to the Cybele's sound later, but, in essence, the Jatoba is just a mahogany substitute.

The neck is of Spanish cedar with a two-way truss rod and a C profile, which is handy for those migrating from an electric guitar – especially so as this model of the two seems to be the all rounder, while the Freja is more oriented to a fingerstylist. We've got a rosewood fingerboard with 20 cleanly cut frets and zero rough edges or dead spots up and down the neck. The headstock is a familiar looking design (a hint of Sobell, right?) and comes adorned with black tuners and an elegant AW logo. Turn the guitar around however, and there's a "made in Korea" stamp. Fighting the urge to get out a piece of sandpaper and rid this handsome Cybele of its birthmark, I flip the guitar the right way up and remember that it's only visual! It does take away from the whole "this was designed by a luthier" aspect but apparently it has to be there and has zero bearing on the guitar's sound or playability.

CYBELE 100J

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Andrew White
Model: Cybele 100J
Retail Price: £400
Body Size: Parlour (see text)
Made In: Korea
Top: Solid Jatoba
Back and Sides: Jatoba
Neck: Spanish Cedar
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Tuners: 18:1 ratio with black buttons
Nut: Graphtech Nubone
Scale Length: 25.5"
Strings Fitted: High quality USA-made
Left Handers: N/A
Gig Bag/Case Included: Padded gig bag

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Trendy, loud, and a head turner for songwriters looking for some a little different
Cons: No electronics on this model meaning gigging songwriters will have to install their own
Overall: A lovely guitar with a great voice and perfect for recording as vocal accompaniment

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★
Sound Quality	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

The North American Guitar
www.thenorthamericanguitar.com

There's a 1 3/4" nut width using a Graphtech Nubone nut – and it's the same for the saddle. Speaking of the saddle, we're back at the lower bout and with a noticeably pleasing bridge design and rosette. The bridge design, with its asymmetric aesthetics, we've seen before on Steve Klein's work coming out of California in the late 1990s, but it's a nice touch here. The jigsaw rosette is lovely. This definitely does make me think it's sharing White's luthier ethos, as a simple few fines lines could be used if they wanted to keep it simple. These visual treats show that this isn't your standard guitar, by any means. There's no glue spill, no messiness at all on the Cybele, which reflects the care and attention at this price point is exceptional. I like the fact that there's nothing really too ostentatious here – no fancy inlays or position markers – but what is there is understated and classy without needless adornments. This gives me a good idea of who this guitar is targeted at.

SOUND QUALITY

Straight away, I know this is a singer-songwriter's guitar. It's unfussy, clean lines and mahogany feel wouldn't be amiss in the hands of someone like Ed Sheeran. Chords are chunky and powerful despite its demure size. It's loud, too – thanks to the lower bout to aid projection. Putting aside the chord-based playing, bluesy licks up and down the fretboard are crisp and clear. You can really dig into this guitar and it gives you everything you want back with aplomb. Even though this is a C shape neck, there is definitely a bit more "meat" there and it coaxes your hand to really go for it and dig in.

The Cybele does kick out an impressive volume when you go for it, while if you pick it there's a delicate sweetness waiting to come out. It's a handsome guitar with a pretty voice, and whether you're a singer-songwriter or the next CandyRat big thing, it looks damn cool. It's a solid build, with a neat finish and cracking value for money. It's not got a huge dreadnought sound so you're not going to get that massive oomph out of it, but for its size, the volume is incredible. It has the all-'hog earthy sound to it, while still being crisp and clear without any muddiness – and it'd be perfect for rhythm playing with vocal accompaniment. If you're recording at home and want an acoustic guitar to stick in the mix – job done.

FREJA 112

BUILD QUALITY

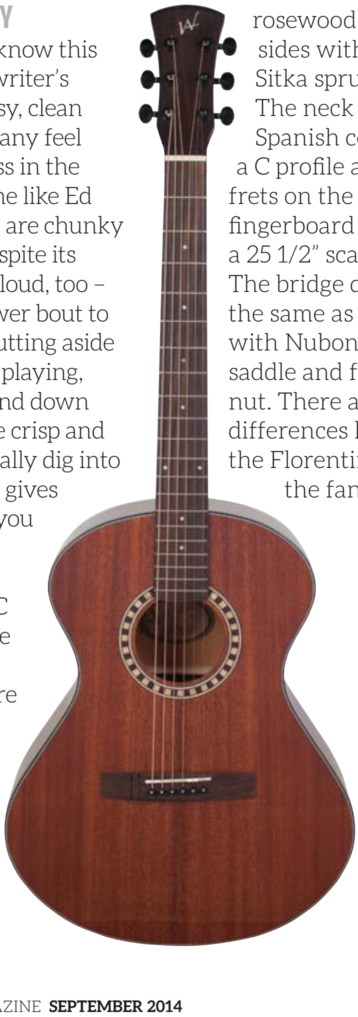
Much like the Cybele, the Freja is designed with a particular player in mind: the fingerstylist. CandyRat player Craig D'Andrea is a user of AW's Freja model. Here we've got a wood combination we're all familiar with: rosewood back and sides with a solid Sitka spruce top. The neck is again Spanish cedar with a C profile and 21 frets on the rosewood fingerboard boasting a 25 1/2" scale length. The bridge design is the same as the Cybele with Nubone for the saddle and for the nut. There are some differences here, too – the Florentine cutaway, the fancier fingerboard inlay and the addition of a preamp package. The preamp – Artec Edge Z – is a little frustrating in its positioning as you'll find it directly in your armpit once you've got the guitar on your knee so, when you're using the tuner, you'll find it a hindrance rather than a help and opt for using your iPhone instead out of ease. There are better places to put this, so I'm confused as to why he'd choose here. A little bit farther along would save craning your neck! Anyway, you've got treble, middle and bass controls to shape your plugged in sound as you wish.

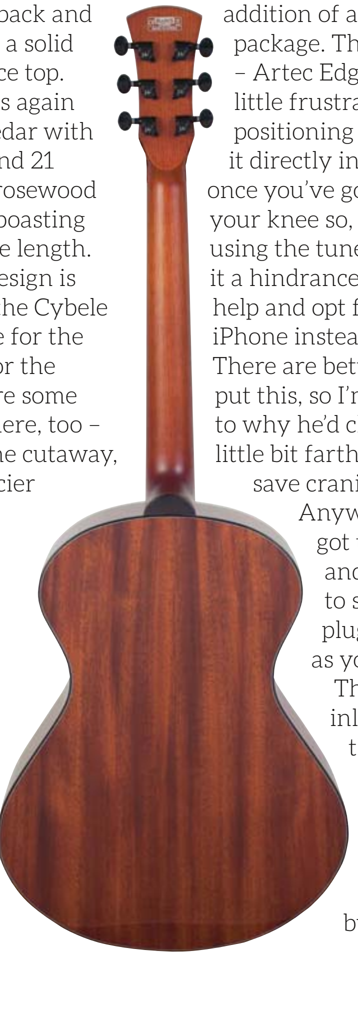
The "crop circle" inlay is the next thing your eyes are drawn to. I'm not a huge fan of this, I find it a little unnecessary, but it's well done, different, and inlaid with wood, which is a nice touch that sets this apart. Again, it makes it seem like not just a standard guitar, but one with a luthier's intricate input. We've got black binding again with a natural finish and satin neck.

The cutaway is a lovely Florentine, just being a little softer than the usual sharp edge we'd be used to. It signals that this guitar isn't just about chomping chords; it's about movement up and down the neck, lead runs, and fingerstyle playing. The Freja shares the Cybele's attention to detail and build quality, with a flawless execution around the bolt-on neck, and no unsightly misgivings other than that stamp on the headstock's reverse once again. The key thing – which is true for both guitars – is that there's no internal sloppiness that's often expected on imported guitars from the Far East.

We've got a larger lower bout again and the flowing lines and curves that Andrew's work is synonymous with. The

The headstock design is a little familiar – a hint of Stefan Sobell, right?





Of the two AWs, the Freja 112 could easily be the fingerstylist's best friend

nut is 1 3/4" again, which is wider than a Martin and it does allow for great room with the left hand. The Freja's body size is comparable to a usual jumbo model, in my opinion, and the spruce soundboard is very attractive and tightly grained. Let's find out what it sounds like…

SOUND QUALITY

According to White, the Freja was named after the Norse goddess of love and war because it is intended to excel at the contrasting roles of rhythm and melody, and I agree that this Freja delivers in terms of that. There's an ample amount of volume and projection and although it's aimed at a fingerstyle player, it does seem a very versatile instrument if you wish to take it out of its comfort zone.

Tuning down to an open C variation, I found that the note clarity and separation was excellent when subtly picked. It's a very well balanced sound with rich trebles and a deep bass when plucked with the nail of your right-hand thumb. It works wonderfully well with a bit of Travis picking, too. It's a guitar that'll handle most styles of playing, but one that is certainly most comfortable with a fingerstylist at the helm. There's no muddiness at all, however while it's still in open C tuning, there is a lack of definition when compared to DADGAD, but that might just be the string tension coming into play. It does sound and feel a little stiffer than the Cybele – but it's a young instrument. Crisp and articulate, it's exactly what a picker wants, with great access up the fretboard, good bass response and more volume thanks to the slightly larger lower bout. It's responsive and very resonant, but it does feel like the "prim and proper" cousin of the Cybele. The Cybele wants to gig in a sweaty underground club with Ryan Adams, while the Freja wants to be in a seated auditorium with Andy McKee.

CONCLUSION

I had a lot more fun with the Cybele than the Freja, but I think that goes back to the intended player. I like the raw edge sensibility of the Cybele, whereas I think the Freja is perhaps a little too well behaved, though well behaved is exactly what you want if you're Andy McKee in a silent auditorium. On the Freja, I'd get rid of the crop circle inlays, move the preamp and hide the made in Korea stamp; on the Cybele I'd change nothing – I wouldn't even ask them to remove the stamp on the back of the headstock because I'd want to scrub it off myself and have it looking a little rough around the edges.

I love the luthier-built sensibility and the idea that you can get a slice of Andrew White for under £600. These guitars cost a fraction of a handmade AW, yet they both still share his excellent attention to detail, build quality, and idiosyncratic flourishes. For the right player, these guitars will undoubtedly serve well indeed.

Perhaps the best compliment is that hanging next to an £8k model – when you'd expect a sub-£1k guitar to stick out like a sore thumb – the AWs don't look out of place. They stand their ground and for the right player, they'll do the job perfectly. The fact that they stand toe-to-toe with luthier-built guitars is testament to AW's hard graft and TNAG's keen eye for not just a great guitar, but an excellent one.

Guy Little

FREJA 112

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Technical Specification
Manufacturer: Andrew White
Model: Freja 112
Retail Price: £549
Body Size: Custom (see text)
Made In: Korea
Top: Solid Sitka Spruce
Back and Sides: Indian Rosewood
Neck: Spanish Cedar
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 21
Tuners: 18:1 ratio with black buttons
Nut: Graphtech Nubone
Scale Length: 25.5"
Electronics: Artec Edge Z
Strings Fitted: High quality USA-made
Left Handers: N/A
Gig Bag/Case Included: Padded gig bag

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Fingerstyle machine with that little something different to the norm and a great price
Cons: Preamp is in a silly position and would become an annoyance when gigging this guitar
Overall: Fantastic build quality with a sweet tone and bags of character

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality	✪✪✪✪
Value for Money	✪✪✪✪✪

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

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The Dubliners	The Essential Collection	Metro Tins	Irish
Fink	Hard Believer	Ninja Tune	Folk
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The Fugitives	Everything Will Happen	Light Organ	Bluegrass
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Goodnight, Texas	Uncle John Farquhar	Tallest Man	Americana
Green Diesel	Wayfarers All	Talking Elephant	Folk Rock
Grace Griffith	Passing Through	Blix Street	Celtic Folk
Peter Himmelman	The Boat That Carries Us	Himmasongs	Folk
The Jayhawks	Rainy Day Music	UMC	Alt Country
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Nancy Kerr	Sweet Visitor	Little Dish	Folk
King Creosote	From Scotland With Love	Domino	Folk
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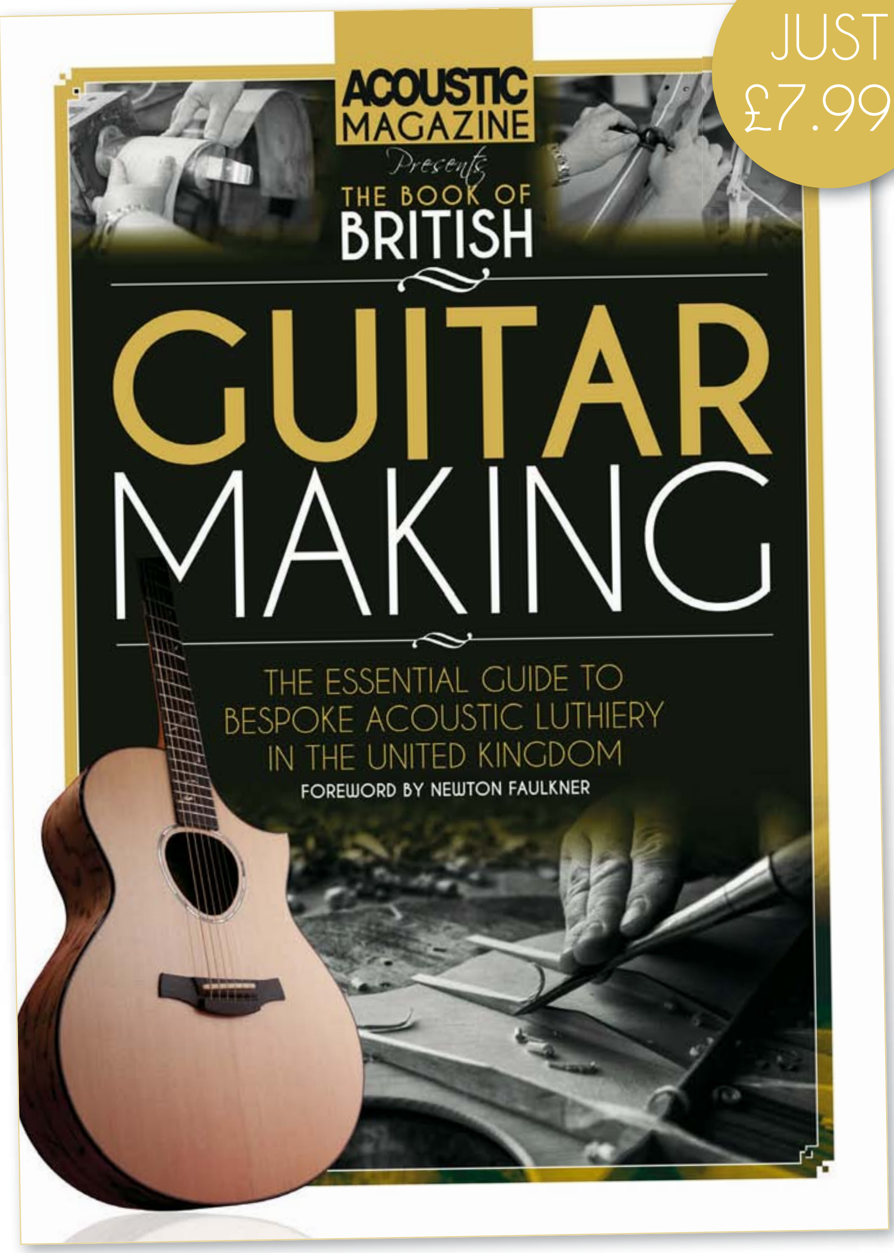

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THE WORKSHOP

Ralph Bown

WHAT DO MARTIN SIMPSON, JOHN RENBOURN, CLIVE CARROLL AND BRENDAN CROCKER ALL HAVE IN COMMON? OTHER THAN BEING DARN FINE ACOUSTIC GUITARS PLAYERS, THAT IS… THEY ALL PLAY RALPH BOWN GUITARS – THAT'S WHAT.

From his shop in York, Ralph Bown builds some of the finest instruments to come out of the UK, and many of the finest fingerstyle guitarists in the world choose Bown guitars. To aficionados the world over, Ralph Bown needs no introduction.

What led you to begin building guitars?
I built my first guitar, a classical, while I was still at school. Later on, when I was doing languages at university, I hawked that guitar around every guitar workshop I could find in Paris one summer. I got to meet Robert Bouchet, Daniel Friedrich and the Favinos and the whole experience just fired me up. All my interests seemed to come together in guitar making and it's all I've done since. I was awarded a grant from the Crafts Council, which was a big help getting tooled up and off the ground to begin with. I started out building classical guitars, but the emphasis shifted over to steel-string instruments quite early on.

Did you have a grounding in woodwork?
I don't have any formal training. When I was young I was heavily into aero-modelling and model-making. In a lot of ways guitars feel like more of a logical extension of that – working to very fine tolerances in wood – rather than cabinet-making. I even had to drop woodwork very early on at school, but there was a brilliant woodwork master called Graham Hall who gave me pretty much free run of the workshops all the way through school and even after. Being self-taught isn't necessarily such a bad thing; you have to figure out for yourself how things tick and you perhaps end up with a more individual approach to everything. Having said that, I've been very fortunate to have had a lot of support and encouragement from some great builders along the way – initially Paul Fischer and David Rubio with the classicals, then later on Steve Phillips, Dave Gregory and Johnny Joyce with the steel-strings.

How did you develop your ideas about the different facets of building, such as bracing?
Mainly from the study of vintage and traditional instruments. I came up with some original bracing ideas for my long-scale baritone and 'D' guitars, but for the most part my bracing patterns have been fairly traditional. I'm always trying new refinements, little details that can all add up to make a big difference, rather than trying to reinvent the wheel. Probably the most distinctive feature of my steel-strings is the use of the Spanish 'slipper heel' for the neck-to-body joint. It's a method I carried over from building classicals, but it works well for me.

Many builders use machines or computer aided design – I'm guessing that you're more "hands on"?
I have one or two machines for taking some of the donkey-work out of thicknessing, but pretty much all the final thicknessing and assembly is done by hand.

"Being self-taught isn't necessarily such a bad thing; you have to figure out for yourself how things tick and you perhaps end up with a more individual approach to everything you end up doing."

If a customer commissions a build from you do you offer a range of models or is every build a custom job?
Just about everything I build is custom-ordered. I build quite a wide range of shapes and sizes, although the smaller bodied fingerstyle guitars I've become associated with, such as the OM, remain the most popular. Rather than just build "stock" models or specs, I try and offer a wide selection of timbers, bindings, purflings, inlays, as well any custom neck requirements. It keeps it interesting for me and for a customer commissioning a hand made instrument that bespoke element is obviously an important part of the process.

On average, how long does a build take?
My waiting list is currently 12-18 months. Without the backlog I could probably finish one comfortably in three months, including finishing, but that obviously includes some dead-time. I've found it works best to have two or three instruments on the go at various stages, but there is usually just one I'm really focused on at any given time. I might sometimes double

"I have my order book down into single figures at the moment for the first time in living memory... It feels good to be able to build things on that initial wave of enthusiasm for a new order."

up where I have a couple of similar instruments to make, but I'm not able to batch build. I have my order book down into single figures at the moment for the first time in living memory and I really want to keep it there now. It feels good to be able to build things on that initial wave of enthusiasm for a new order, plus I've reached the stage now where I want to be able to build a few more things that appeal to me on spec.

Has the restrictions on certain timbers put in place by the CITES Treaty affected you?

Protecting endangered species is obviously a very necessary and worthwhile thing. It's a bit worrying how the supply of even common woods like mahogany is now becoming problematic, though I guess we have to accept it as inevitable. The restrictions implemented by the Lacey Act have made it very difficult to source certain materials from the US latterly and I had to be very careful that all the woods in a couple of guitars I sent there recently were acceptable for import. You have to account in the documentation for the source of every last bit of wood. That's a problem for any individual luthier like myself, because we're so far down the food chain that any timber has probably been bought and sold half a dozen times before it filters down to us and it's very difficult to account for its source. Really all you can do is try to buy responsibly sourced and sustainable wood in good faith from reputable suppliers.

Are you experimenting with alternative timbers?

I find I'm often asked by customers for the more traditional woods, though I'm quite happy to experiment with alternative timbers and it's obvious that things will have to move in that direction anyway. Latterly I've used readily available woods such as Australian Blackwood, Palo Escrito, Padauk and Bubinga – all with excellent results. Often the hardest part can be trying to get people interested in trying them out. I think players can sometimes be a lot more conservative than makers in that respect.

For more information, visit Ralph's site: **www.bownguitars.co.uk**

David Mead

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BRYNN HISCOX CASE HISTORY

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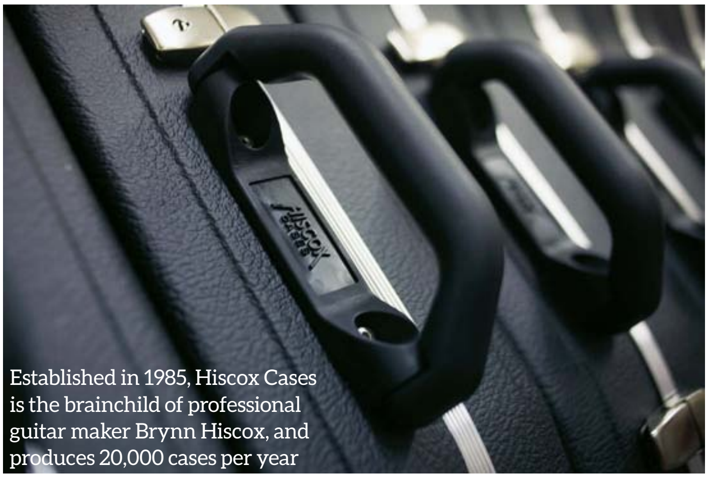
WORDS: DAVID MEAD IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE


Established in 1985, Hiscox Cases is the brainchild of professional guitar maker Brynn Hiscox, and produces 20,000 cases per year

Hiscox cases are sold in 20 countries worldwide as well as to more than 900 UK retailers and instrument makers

These days, the chances are that if you have ordered a precious hand-built acoustic guitar from a top ranking luthier, it will arrive at your door nestled safely inside a Hiscox Liteflight case. The Staffordshire based company represent something of an industry staple, currently producing 20,000 cases per year for high end makers like Lowden, Eggle and Fylde, to name but a few. Renowned for their toughness and durability – even their Standard model has been load tested to half a ton – Hiscox cases also has the reputation for being light and eminently easy to transport. But, as is often the case, it was necessity that proved to be the mother of the Liteflight's invention. In fact, the story begins around 30 years ago when company founder Brynn Hiscox was building acoustic guitars...

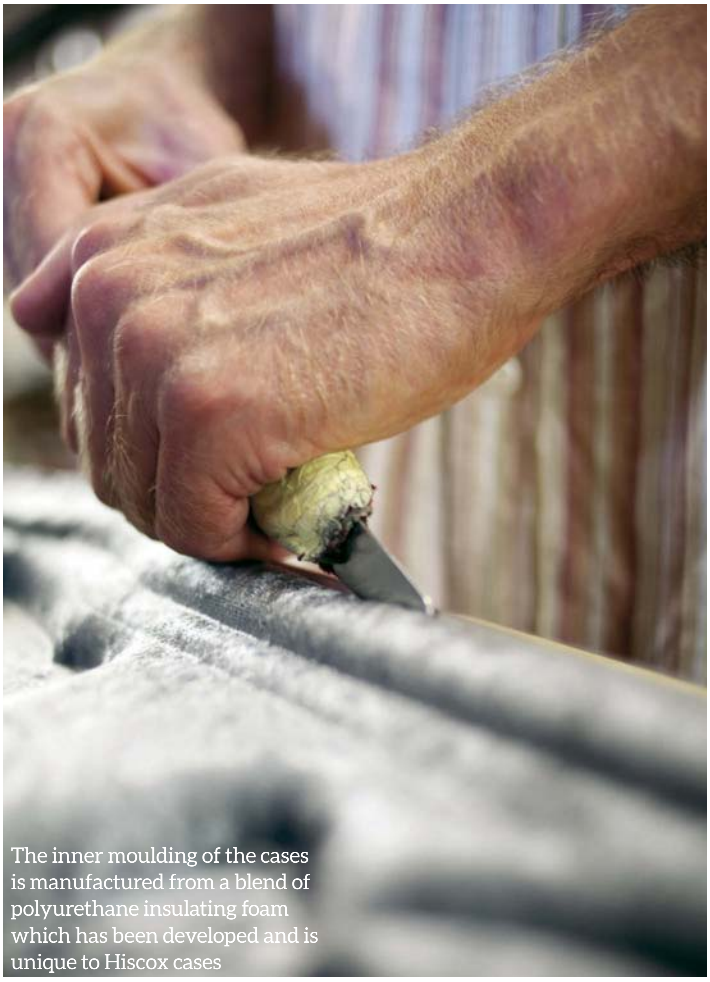
'I was building copies of dreadnoughts, OOOs and J200s, that sort of thing, back in the days when Ovation was really big. They had cracked the on-stage problem properly for the first time in acoustic guitars in that people were able to play on stage and actually be heard without the awful feedback problems. It was intriguing; I wasn't interested in electro-acoustic instruments at all, but someone came into my workshop with an Ovation and I liked the shape and found it very comfortable to sit with. But I hated the fact that it was a big, plastic bowl! I was intrigued by what an acoustic guitar would sound like if it was made in the shape of an Ovation but with proper wood and so I spent a lot of time building jigs in order to be able to make a bowl back guitar. The very first one that I produced was a beautiful sounding instrument and, in fact, Joan Armatrading has that very same guitar to this day, or so I'm told. Because the design was so successful in that they stayed together and worked, I marketed myself as just building those bowl-backed guitars and that's what I did for a few years. But I had a problem finding cases; I did find some, but I was never happy with them,' Brynn says.

It was an unfortunate incident involving shipping one of Brynn's guitars that led him to consider making his own cases.

I had a guy who was globe-trotting turn up at the workshop and

Forming the case's outer shell takes only three minutes

Bending the aluminium for the protective rim



The inner moulding of the cases is manufactured from a blend of polyurethane insulating foam which has been developed and is unique to Hiscox cases

buy one of the sample guitars I always had around and he flew off to Hawaii and the guitar got smashed in transit. That really spurred me on to do something – I had no intention at that stage of having a case making factory, I just wanted better cases for my own instruments. I was building full-time and so during the evenings and weekends I was working on construction methods and various materials, begging, borrowing and stealing bits and pieces from everywhere. It was obvious from fairly early on that it had to be a composite construction using modern materials rather than just plywood and stuff, which just ends up being too heavy. The customers that were coming through my door were saying they wanted lighter cases; there was all this modern stuff flying about but no one was doing anything about it – everyone was still using plywood. That was the criteria I used initially and I did start off making the outer shells out of a very thin layer of glass fibre and there are a lot of those cases still around because we see them coming in. For the first two years all my cases had a glass fibre exterior, but that was very costly and so after about 18 months or so I again did a lot of research and ended up using an ABS based forming material. We switched from making the shells in half an hour to making them in three minutes! We've got a huge vacuum-forming machine here, it's a very big piece of kit. It's thermo-forming or vacuum-forming – it's the same thing – and so you heat the ABS sheet to a predetermined temperature, it then gets pressed on to a tool which is the shape of the object that you want to reproduce and then a vacuum is turned on so that it sucks the plastic down on to whatever shape the tool is. In a three-minute cycle we will mould a whole case – one matching lid and base – in one go.'

It's amazing to think that a whole case can be formed so quickly – it sounds like quite a complex process?

It's a standard industrial process, but the choice of materials is vital and that's where the technical side takes over. I wanted to bond the ABS to a particular type of polyurethane foam and polyurethane foam is available in different forms, from a lightweight packaging product right through to the structural variety which will give shock absorbency in motorway bridges and everything in between. So we designed a polyurethane foam for Hiscox Cases; it's not used by anyone else on the planet, as far as I know. It's designed so that we can apply it and structurally create what we need to within the case. It's taken a long, long time to perfect to the level at which we do it and if we make 2,000 cases a month, I'll be upset if we get more than three rejects.

The polyurethane inside the cases isn't just there to give the guitar something relatively soft to lie on. Other factors include shock absorbency and insulation and it differs greatly from cases that use polystyrene instead.

The vast majority of cases coming out of the Far East at the moment will be polystyrene and you can normally tell when you open the case and pull on the handle, the outer shell will pull away from the interior moulding. There will be a gap there and it will feel loose and that's because the polystyrene cannot be manufactured in the shell – it has to be manufactured separately and glued in afterwards. So there's always a gap around the edge and, as anyone with that type of case will know, the interior moulding comes loose very quickly and starts to flop about. With ours, the beauty of the technical requirements of our materials

All the hardware is riveted to the aluminium rim for added strength

The outer ABS shell material is chosen not only for its high impact resistance, but for the ability to chemically bond to the inner moulding during the manufacturing process

Company logo blanks for case lids

is that we make the moulding inside the shell. We've juggled the specification of the interior of the ABS and the polyurethane so that we actually get a chemical bond between the polyurethane and the outer shell. When it's poured in it's like a thick cream and so it will then flow over every millimetre of the interior of that shell and expand to around 40 times its original volume. It forces itself into all the cavities that we create within that case and at the same time it chemically etches itself into the inside skin of the shell. You end up with a composite structure – you can't tear them apart – and that's the technical difference between polyurethane and polystyrene. Another important difference between the two is that the bubbles in polystyrene have just air inside them, but the bubbles within the polyurethane contain an insulating gas which is the same that you would find in fridges and freezers. If you put your hand on a sheet of polystyrene it will feel warm; it will reflect the heat back, but what you don't realise is that the heat is passing through the polystyrene and passing out the other side. It's not a very good insulating material – it just kids you that it is. But polyurethane is a pretty good insulator and it's about as good as you're going to get within the confines of building a case. We've done tests – the results are on the website – both hot and cold and you can see the differences between an ordinary plywood case, a polystyrene case and ours. We outperformed significantly...

This is good news for owners of guitars that have been finished with nitrocellulose, which is very susceptible to sudden changes in temperature.

We can't give any guarantees, obviously, because we don't know what kinds of abuse the product is going to be put through. All we can say is that, like for like, a Hiscox will keep the excesses of heat and cold out for longer than the alternatives. Most people are going to throw their guitar in the boot and drive to a gig an hour or so away in the middle of winter and when they get there the case is freezing cold, but on opening it's still at room temperature inside. That's the benefit; in a plywood case it will be freezing cold inside and you have a cold guitar. That's demonstrably true and just part of the benefit of the structure that we've designed over the years.

Another strengthening factor is the aluminium rim that circles a Hiscox case – but there's more here than meets the eye, too...

You can't see most of it! I have looked at ways to switch things around over the years and put the aluminium on the outside so that people can see it but unfortunately it doesn't work. We have a relatively floppy outer plastic shell and a very firm aluminium rim and so if we're going to fix the two together, we're obviously going to fix the shell to the aluminium using the rivet fixings that apply the hardware. If you can imagine going from the outside in, you have a catch or a lock and through the catch goes the rivet, which goes through the plastic and then it will go through the aluminium rim and fix on the back side. You're squashing what is effectively a rubbery material against two pieces of steel and that's the best engineering fix for the problem. If we were to switch and put the aluminium on the outside, you would then have a steel lock, then the aluminium and the rivet would go through those two, but on the inside you'd have the floppy plastic. So how are you going to fix the floppy plastic back against the aluminium? The only down

A high level of thermal insulation protects against rapid temperature changes

side to the way we have it now is that the customer can't see the bulk of the aluminium.

Hiscox produce three different grades of Liteflight case: the Standard, Pro II and the Artist. I asked Brynn if he could outline the differences between them.
We had a lot of makers requesting a higher quality case and so we asked ourselves how far we could push this product upmarket, without making it too heavy or changing the shell to a very expensive carbon fibre or something of that order. The outer shell takes all the bumps and the bangs and the knocks, scuffs and scratches, but unfortunately it is a plastic moulding and if you hit it hard with something sharp you will puncture it. We did a lot of tests on the benefits of increasing the shell thickness and were surprised to find that just by increasing the outer shell thickness by half a millimetre it doubled the puncture resistance. We repeated all the tests and it's an absolute fact. By increasing the shell thickness from 1.5mm to 2mm the puncture resistance is doubled. Then, by increasing from 2mm to 2.5mm, amazingly enough it doubles again. So our Artist case, which is only 1mm thicker than our standard case, is four times more puncture resistant. Moreover, it has some additional internal padding, strategically placed so that there are two squashy foam pads on the upper bout and two on the lower because we discovered early on that this would cater for quite a variety of sizes. A dreadnought, for instance, can be anything from 15.75 to 16.25 inches across the lower bout and still be considered dreadnought size. By going from the Standard case, which is effectively unpadded, to the Pro II case, which is padded, the instrument will fit better and be held better as well as giving twice the impact resistance. We then go to the Artist case that features fully hardened aluminium which has twice the rigidity of the aluminium on the other cases. It has a thicker shell again and twice the impact resistance of the Pro case and four times that of the Standard case and, equally important, it has a lot more internal padding. So the Artist cases tend to be slightly larger to allow for the cushion padding within the case and, visually, it has a more luxurious fabric on the inside, too and comes with a fully leather handle as well.

There are plenty of testimonies on the Hiscox website which tell stories of how their cases have protected valuable instruments in all manner of guitar threatening situations. One in particular relates to a basement studio being flooded and the only instrument that survived intact was a Lowden found floating on the surface of the water tucked safely in a Hiscox case.
They will naturally float, but we don't ever market them as waterproof. The mating between the lid and the base is pretty much as good as you're going to get it within what we do. If you went to a supplier that was supplying the military with something like a computer case that needs to be waterproof, then a rectangular case about the size of a briefcase would set you back about £1,000. You could certainly do the same with ours, but the next level of engineering required to make that seal between lid and base fully waterproof is something else, hence the price. If you consider that our Pro II case is around £120 and you compare that to £1,000 for a rectangular box, it's a whole different level. We could do it, but there's nobody out there who would pay the price, because generally it's not required. They're generally storm-proof; if you walk down the road in a thunderstorm you don't need to worry too much because our aluminium rim has a double "V" in it – it's not a simple male to female locating section – and it will lip away any water that tends to get into the join so that it runs around the outside of the case rather than run in.

If you want to know more about how a Hiscox case is made, there's a video in the digital edition where Brynn goes into great detail about the internal structuring of a Liteflight case. There are also testimonials, heat and cold test results and a wonderful video featuring five Hiscox employees standing on one of their Standard cases with no harm coming to its precious contents.
www.hiscoxcases.com

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COLLECTORS' COLUMN

Music's most sought after guitars? The instruments of Bozo Podunavac – with Paul Brett...

The exhibition of many instruments from my collection has now been confirmed to start on 1 April 2015, through to the auction on the 20 June 2015. This will be held at Tennants Fine Arts Auctioneers in Leyburn, North Yorkshire. If anyone is interested in bidding on a variety of rare and iconic stringed instruments that I have collected over the many years, then contact Tennants and put your name down for a catalogue. The auction will also be online worldwide, so if you can't make the actual auction date in Yorkshire, you can bid from the comfort of your home – you still have to register with Tennants to do so, however. Legendary producer and co-founder of Virgin Records, Tom Newman, will be exhibiting some rarities from the early Virgin days and items from the Manor Studios. Doyen of the album cover art world Roger Dean will also be contributing to the event. Roger's unique and brilliant work for the Yes album covers makes him one of the most iconic designers in this genre. There will also be some guitars in the exhibition only, put in by some of the world's most famous players. This whole venture came about from a meeting I had with Tennants' associate director and auctioneer Nigel Smith whom you may have seen many times on the BBC's Flog It, hosted by musician Paul Martin. We met at last year's London Acoustic Guitar Show. Nigel is a keen guitarist himself and is the man to contact at Tennants.

Having said all that, the actual practicalities for me, personally, are daunting in preparing for such a big event. As my guitars are in professional storage in several places away from my home, I have embarked upon the task of sorting out exactly what I have collected over the years since I began collecting in the 1960s. Back then, there was no market in collecting guitars as pop music was in its infancy and many of the guitars that have since become iconic and collectable now, were purchased as new in that era. Even early American blues guitars made by the likes of Oscar Schmidt carried very little value or interest to the serious collector or player back then. Nowadays, his instruments from the 1920s and 1930s – especially the 12-strings – are much in demand and carry quite considerable price tags. My collection starts around the mid-1700s (although I haven't got that many from the early period) to modern day instruments. Most of it lies in the era from the late 1800s to the 1930s and then quite a few electrics and acoustics from the 1950s and later. You may think it strange that I have not collected any Martins during my time as a collector, but that's purely down to my preference as a player and the style of music I have played or been interested in over the years. There are quite a few iconic Gibsons from the 1920s and 1930s and many Stellas from the same period. There are also lots of other items including mandolins, banjos, tipples, ukuleles and probably other things that I have forgotten about but will come to light as I go through the storage bunkers. Guide prices will be listed when the brochure is finalised. Obviously it's also a journey of rediscovery for me as well, because I have forgotten many items I acquired. I have mentioned the Bozo 12-string I have in previous articles but I had completely overlooked one of his six-strings that I also have and it was therefore a pleasant surprise to open a case and find one of his Bell Western six-strings from the early 1970s that was made on licence by the excellent Japanese maker Yari.

Bozo Podunavac was born in Serbia but emigrated to the States in 1959. He set up shop and made guitars for many people including the 12-string guitarist Leo Kottke. Bozo guitars are highly sought after. An original Bozo 1977 cutaway six-string recently sold for $22,000. The Yari licensed models are nowhere near that price, yet they are great looking and sounding instruments. They have solid spruce tops, Indian rosewood back and sides, maple bindings and beautiful adornments including a double rope binding around the length of the guitar. They are jumbo sized and produce huge chordal sounds and clear picking tones. The nut is a comfortable 43.5mm and scale length of 645mm. The tuners are gold plated Grovers and the fretboard is inlaid with an art deco-inspired abalone inlay. Add a Fishman Rare earth pickup and it will fill any auditorium with ease; and for those who are image conscious – it looks fantastic!

For more info, visit: ***www.tennants.co.uk***

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12 STRING CORNER

Storing your discarded songwriting ideas for another day

It doesn't seem like 10 years since 12-string blues legend John Joyce died. Unlike John, who never strayed outside his beloved blues genre, I've since experimented with different genres and instruments. It is, however, undeniable that the main roots of the 12-string guitar lie in blues and Mexican music. Lead Belly is probably the most legendary 12-string player from the traditional blues era. Another of John's favourite players was Blind Willie McTell, whose best-known song is 'Statesboro Blues'. McTell was a major influence on many musicians and some even took his surname for their own.

Latterly, Jimmy Reed took up playing the instrument and made an album featuring it, but he was much better known for his electric playing. It is the roots of the instrument that are important to what we play today – not forgetting Lydia Mendoza, the darling of Mexican music.

Many modern players I have observed record with a mix of pickup and microphones, as well as some effects in the mix. Some are very good, while others just swamp the guitar's natural tone to the point where it sounds like another instrument!

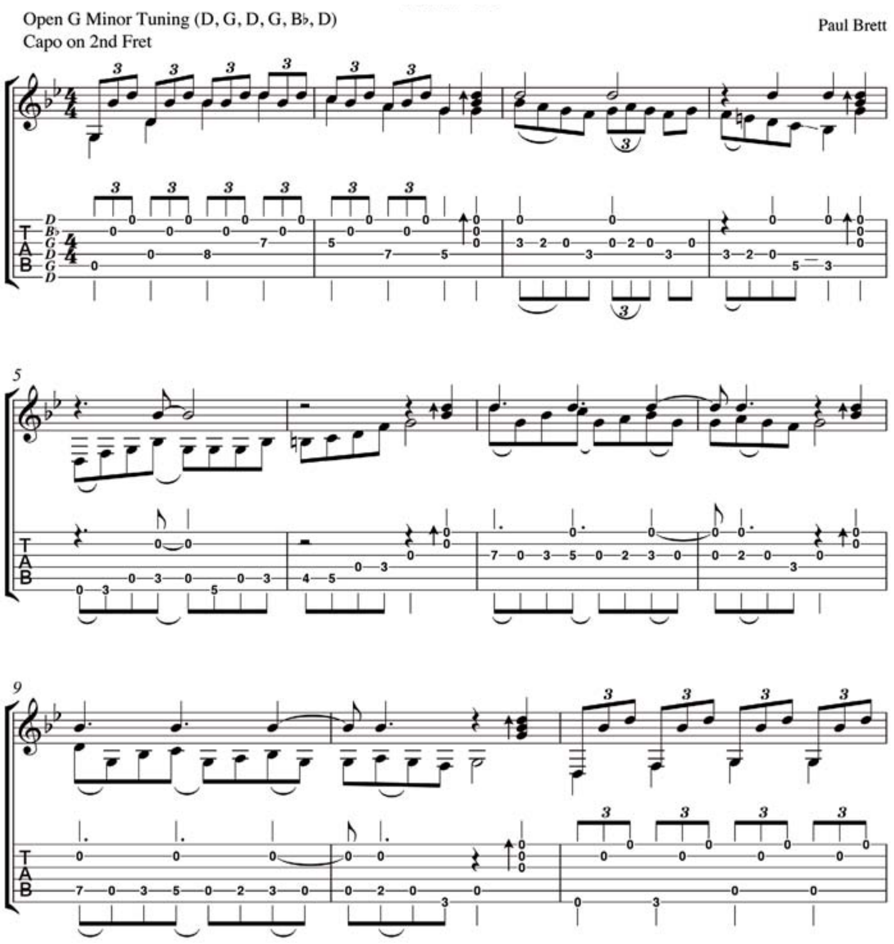
It's nice to see far more people using a 12-string these days than I have noticed before, and lots are experimenting with different styles and tunings. Unlike six-string guitar playing, there are not that many 12-string styles or players to draw influence from and very few people perform complete sets using 12-strings. One of my favourite tunings these days for my style of 12-string playing is open Gm tuned down a tone or tone and a half which, in fact, gives you open Fm or open Em. This tuning is a very flexible tuning and the drop in pitch makes the guitar sound deeper and fuller while not losing its top end – it actually takes out some brittleness that can sometimes occur.

I favour a 12-fret-to-body rather than 14-fret-to-body, especially for lower pitch tunings and fingerstyle playing. The string tension is tighter in the dropped tunings and not so flappy as in 14-fret models. I have recently switched to the new D'Addario EXP strings. They are a little more expensive than usual, but they last longer and after a few weeks the tone settles down perfectly for what I require. I use the light gauge ones on one 12-string and medium on another (for blues playing).

I can sit for days playing the 12-string intending to write new tunes, but with no outcome. Suddenly, something clicks and an idea is born – it can just be a melody or a phrase that I have to practice in order to play it cleanly. Then, using this as a template, I develop the tune. The hardest part is getting the idea in the first place as I'm sure is the case for others. Discarded ideas are common for all but, while you or I may think they don't appeal, others may disagree. I have taken to just recording stuff I don't like onto my iPad and storing them in case I may not have been in the right frame of mind that particular day to seriously consider that those ideas could be something of use. This month's offering is a piece that contains a mixture of melody and twiddly bits. I'm using my mid-1970s Aria 12-string capo'd at the second fret – and yes, this was actually a 14-fret-to-body guitar!

Paul Brett

'FRETDANCER' BY PAUL BRETT



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IN THE LOOP

TURNING THE THREE-CHORD TRICK INTO SOMETHING MUCH MORE INTERESTING

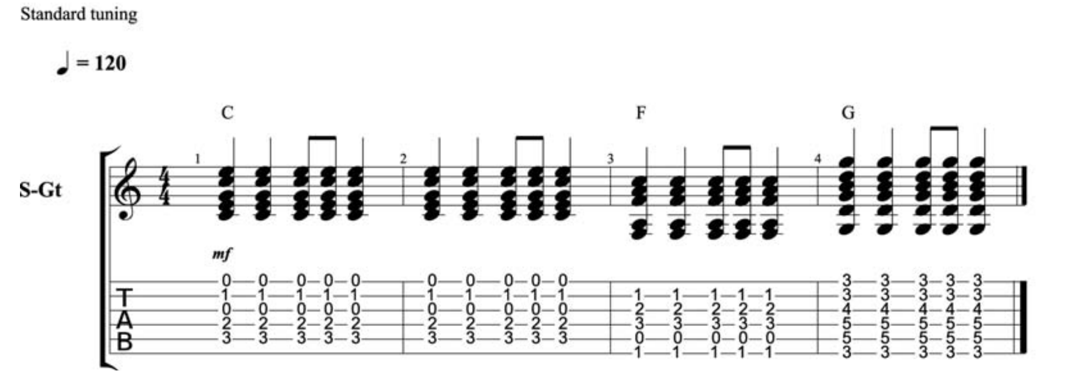
There has always been an idea that some songwriters believe it's all about "three chords and the truth", and that keeping it simple, musically, is the key to getting across the message in the lyrics. I've always been more interested in a few more chords and some inversions, but even with the simplest chord sequences and just an acoustic guitar and a loop pedal you can come up with interesting material. One of the simplest chord progressions is the three-chord trick. In the key of C, it's C (tonic), F (sub-dominant) and G (dominant). Many traditional blues, country and pop songs are all built around three chords from a standard 12-bar blues scenario, such as songs by Bob Dylan and the Beatles.

A song like 'Breakfast At Tiffany's' by Deep Blue Something is an example of a three-chord song that keeps the audience's attention by having a strong lyric and melody plus an interesting arrangement with a reoccurring guitar solo section. It was a huge hit and, although that's no measure of quality, it is a catchy pop tune made of only three chords. If you notice in each version of the verse in this song they add more interesting guitar parts. They drop the rhythm section in and out and add distorted guitars as required to make things more interesting. With such simple harmonic material, you really need to keep the arrangements exciting and dynamic.

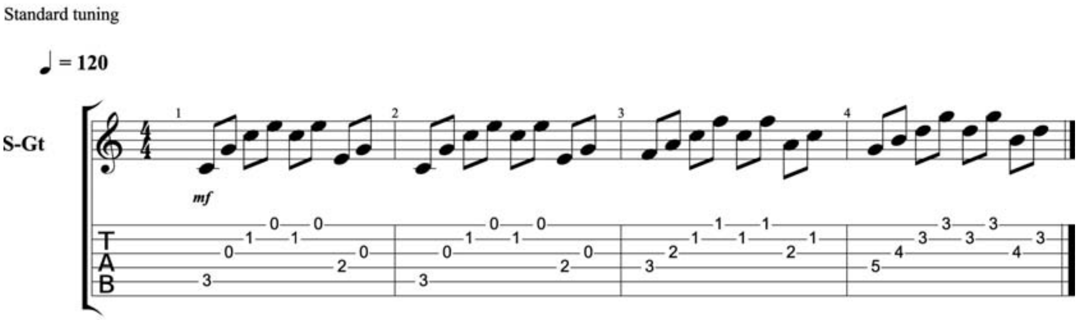
With a loop pedal, there are numerous ideas we can apply to a simple chord progression. We can alter and invert the chords, change the rhythms, add melodies, effects pedals and bass lines, hit the body of the guitar to fake drum patterns or even hit the reverse button on our looper pedal and play the chord progression backwards. You can use any time signature or rhythmic variation you want – 5/4 or a waltz and triplets. You can also add in odd bar lengths; no one said you had to play all three chords in 4/4. You could play them as three bars of 4/4 then a bar of 5/4. It's up to you. Listen to the way Pixies, Cardiacs or the Beatles use unusual bar lengths – they'll add in a 2/4 in 4/4 to extend a section. These subtle ideas can be really useful.

Example 1 is our three chords – C, F and G – played in 4/4. Hit record on your looper pedal and play in these chords and get it looping around. The trick is to get your foot perfectly in time on the pedal, try feeling the rhythm in your foot by tapping along for a bit before trying to

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



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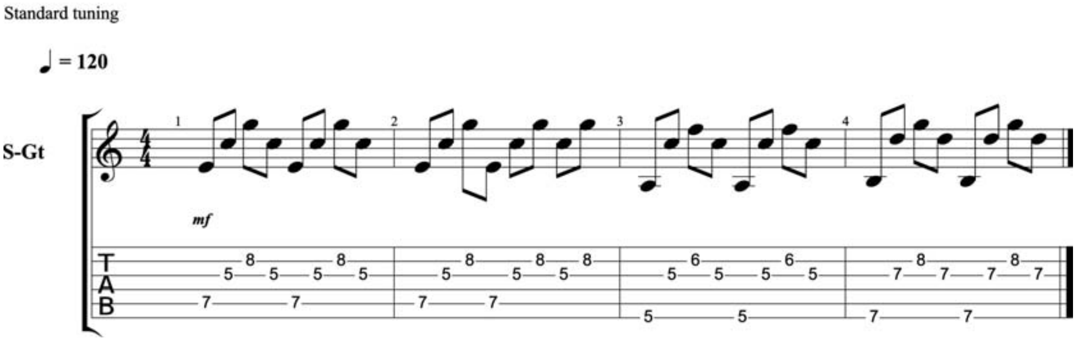
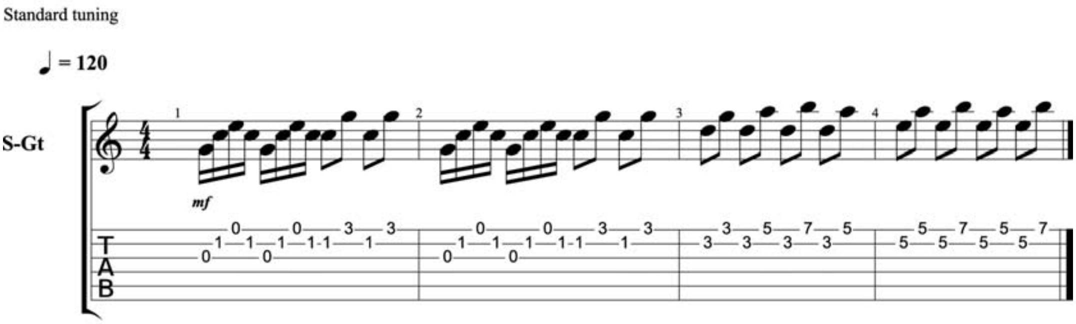


EXAMPLE 4



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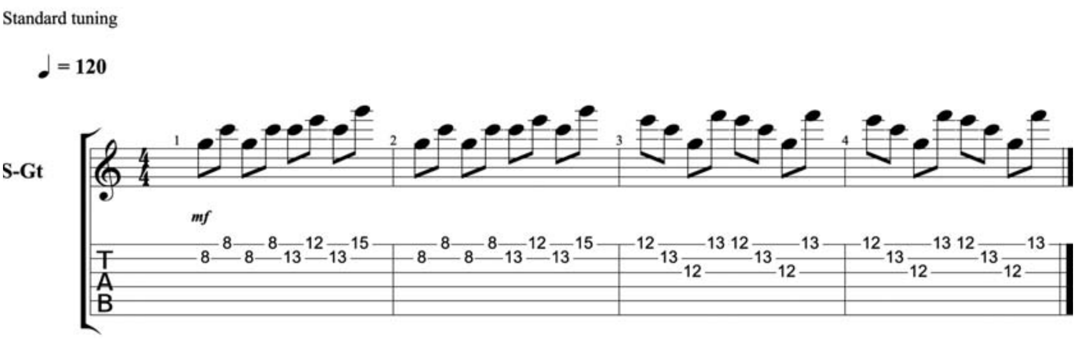

MATT STEVENS

Instrumental Composer

Matt Stevens is a musician and composer from London. An instrumental artist, he uses an acoustic guitar and sampler to create multi-layered tracks live. His music has been described as "a guitar orchestra". He plays live all over the UK and listens to Sonic Youth, Carcass, Nick Drake, Cardiacs and King Crimson. He is constantly recording new music for several projects.

www.mattstevensguitar.com

record the loop. Remember that playing to a metronome really helps to build up the level of rhythmic consistency required to play loops accurately. It just takes a bit of practice to get the loops perfectly in time.

Now we have our simple chord progression looping around, we can start to look at making things a bit more interesting. First of all, we'll add some arpeggios – broken up chord tones that will make it a bit more interesting. Hit record and play in the arpeggios in **example 2**; be careful to keep them perfectly in time. At this point it can be useful to have an undo button on your loop pedal if you do happen to make a mistake. When purchasing your first loop pedal, try a few and consider what you'll need. An undo button can also be useful for stripping back arrangements of overdubs to just the original chord progression you had for dynamic variation.

Example 3 is where things start to get a bit more interesting. Here we are going to add some inversions of our original chord progression. In **example 1**, all of our chords are in the root position; for the C chord, the lowest note is C in the bass. When you invert the chord you play a note other than the root of the triad in the bass; here we will play a first inversion that means you play the third of the triad in the bass rather than the root. Hit record and play in the arpeggios in **example 3**.

In **example 4** we can add something more melodic – it's a jangly part that could be used as an extra layer for later in the song. If you were to sing one verse of a song over **example 1**, then added the later examples as the song built up through the later verses, it would really help to build things dynamically.

Example 5 is another jangly part higher up the neck more along the lines of something Radiohead or Johnny Marr would play. These higher parts can sound really effective right at the end of a song to give the final verse of a song a sense of urgency and climax. Remember that it's all about light and shade, and dynamics. If you build parts up gradually, it'll help to keep the audience's attention.

Next, hit record and play in **example 6**: some octaves. Best known for their use in jazz by Wes Montgomery, or by Jimi Hendrix or Smashing Pumpkins in rock, octaves can also sound interesting in an acoustic context. Slide from one octave to another to keep it fluid. These parts are just ascending up the major scale but help to give the arrangement a sense of motion. Hit record and add in **example 7** which is some octaves descending the other way. These parts sound really good against each other in counterpoint. Listen to some of Bach's classical pieces and you'll hear much more of this style of arrangement.

Now you have built things up subtly layer by layer it's time to really go for it to finish off the song. Finally, hit overdub and record on your loop pedal and leave it on – then record **example 8**. Leave record on and the parts will overdub over themselves every four bars. With the tremolo picking build up the speed very gradually, it takes time but it's worth it because it really sounds exciting at the end of the song.

These are only a few ideas for making simple songs a bit more interesting. Keep trying different ideas until you find your own style, listening as widely as possible and being unafraid to take things from different genes and play them on the acoustic guitar. Jon Gomm is best known as an acoustic guitarist, but his roots are in rock music. By taking his ideas and playing them on the acoustic guitar, he developed a style all of his own. Don't be afraid to take risks and come up with your own style of music. Take from everything you hear and keep an open mind.

Matt Stevens

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NEW MUSIC

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Anyone who thought that 70s pop was all about fey young gents in velvet loons talking about the growing bean sprouts should listen in. Describing themselves as a "soul-bruised psychedelic duo", these Sunderland lads tread an intriguing musical line that owes much to the summery sounds of 70s California. With its throbbing bass and buzzing fuzzed guitar lines 'Keep Moving' is T-Rex meets the Glitter Band, then there's the Mungo Jerry-ish acoustic guitar intro and chorus they come up with on 'Animals' (more Bolan noises) and the dark fuzz guitar that introduces 'Blue' is pure Bowie. So what you hear is certainly what you get, and you know exactly where it's coming from. Engaging and the perfect backdrop for sipping Pimms on the decking, if you haven't heard this kind of stuff before, then maybe this happy package is for you? Recycling never did Oasis any harm.

JULIAN PIPER

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER

LATENESS OF DANCERS

www.mergerecords.com

Self penned PR can be a killer, and the blurb accompanying this fifth album by North Carolina-based singer-songwriter M.C. Taylor aka Hiss Golden Messenger, works hard at building mystic. He's apparently "been writing some of the most highly regarded Americana music of the last decade" and this is "a deliverance of the self to the self." Heavy. But hopes of hearing something breathtakingly original, are quickly dashed by the mono chordal opening track 'Lucia', a song which references Dylan and Lou Reed in about equal measure. Bob's influence resonates through what follows, but by the time you reach the moody title track with M.C.'s delicate piano and the sound of his kids murmuring on 'Day O' Day' – an endearing human touch – and come across the dark pulsing 'I'm A Raven', strangely you're hooked. Worth checking out.

JULIAN PIPER

BRONWYNNE BRENT

STARDUST

www.bronwynnebrent.com

Raised in the Mississippi Delta, and a CD cover on which she sports a diaphanous white dress with flowers entwined in her hair like a vestal virgin, Ms Brent certainly poses an intriguing image. So it's almost disappointing to find that what's on offer is far from weird. With a voice that lies somewhere between the yuppie jazz inflections of Norah Jones and the soul sass of Amy Whitehouse, Bronwynne's forte appears to be an obsession with sad affairs of the heart. Happily on 'Don't Tell Your Secrets To The Wind', there's a smile in her voice that suggests despite admitting, "I was young and so naïve" all is not lost. The girl adds some inspired acoustic guitar to the mix, and the subtle strings that frame 'Dark Highway', the flourishes of banjo and reverb drenched electric guitar on 'Devil Again', all make for an affecting take on that age-old subject.

JULIAN PIPER

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LOVE WE ARE WE LOVE

www.theseathesea.com

Describing themselves as an alternative folk-rock duo, Chuck E. Costa and Mira Stanley weave faultless harmonies around classic folk backings, their first song 'Blah' instructing the listener, "There's no such thing as too much faith, there is only losing faith" laying a template for much of what follows. Honest, unpretentious music of shifting moods, underscored by Chuck's guitar and banjo, there's a lightness of touch that outshines many of their many peers. The heart of the album lies with tracks like 'Fist Full Of Flowers' and 'Watertreader', dark guitar figures hanging in the air and Mira's vocals pure as a mountain stream. The whole thing might easily have become mawkish – as this stuff can – but instead it's a quiet gem.

JULIAN PIPER

ANNIE EVE

SUNDAY '91

www.facebook.com/annieevemusic

Annie Eve has apparently been inspired by "women who wore their hearts on their sleeve and weren't afraid to write wildly." So after that it comes as a surprise to find that what's on offer is far from Ani DiFranco or Mary Gauthier territory; instead Annie drips her wordy lyrics around songs decorated with soft often ethereal instrumentation reminiscent of Bon Iver, arrangements centered around her delicate fingerpicking and acoustic guitar – the songs segueing into a dream like sonic backdrop. The whole thing rarely gets out of first gear, and what she's singing about is often unclear, but there's a mysterious musical mother lode at work, and songs like the haunting 'Ropes' and the entrancing 'Animal', are full of grace.

JULIAN PIPER

BILLY JOE SHAVER

LONG IN THE TOOTH

www.billyjoeshaver.com

When Billy Joe duets with his old buddy Willie Nelson singing, "It's hard to be an outlaw when the only friends left are behind those swinging doors," the old renegade is probably touching a very personal nerve. One of the gang that impaled country music on its rhinestone grave back in the 70s, this album – his first in six years – finds the 74-year-old songwriter has lost none of the fire and grit that marked his earlier work. From the breakneck country honk of 'Sunbeam Special', to the slow loping 'The Git Go', a no punches pulled take of life in the Shaver cosmos, he's come up with one of those albums that only someone with cloth ears wouldn't like. And if you're looking for a drinking song, 'Last Call For Alcohol' just about says it all. Wonderful stuff from a master from Nashville's dark side.

JULIAN PIPER

BRIGITTE DEMEYER

SAVANNAH ROAD

www.brigittedemeyer.com

She may not come from below the Mason Dixon line – she's a California gal – but Ms. DeMeyer is drenched in pure southern country soul, with an aptitude for shaping songs that leap out of any lurking Nashville rut and head every which way. With guitar wizard Will Kimbrough on hand, from the opening bars of the title track, where Kimbrough's dark steel sets the scene for a song that could be the backdrop for a Faulkner novel, Ms. Meyer weaves her way through an eclectic bunch of songs, moving from the bruised heart and tangled love of 'Please Believe Me', to the bouncy lustful strut of 'Honey Hush'. But it's her voice that remains the main event, an instrument that is at one moment brushed with little girl tones reminiscent of Rickie Lee Jones, but cracks at the edges with rough blues.

JULIAN PIPER

DR. JOHN

SKE-DAT-DE-DAT SPIRIT OF SATCH

ww.nitetripper.com

It's always a treat when the good Dr. comes up with some new shenanigans and, this time round, New Orleans' most venerated living musical icon has come up with a set paying tribute to Louis Armstrong – "The most famous guy to come out of my neighbourhood" as he calls him. And if at first sight songs like 'Wonderful World' and 'Mack The Knife' might not seem obvious vehicles for Mac's growling rasp, then think again. With a star-studded bunch of guests including The Blind Boys Of Alabama and the almost obligatory Bonnie Raitt on hand, what you have is a heck of a party record that cranks out good times from start to finish. Anchored by the Dr.'s rolling piano, highlights include 'When You're Smiling' and 'Gutbucket Blues'; let the good times roll indeed!

JULIAN PIPER

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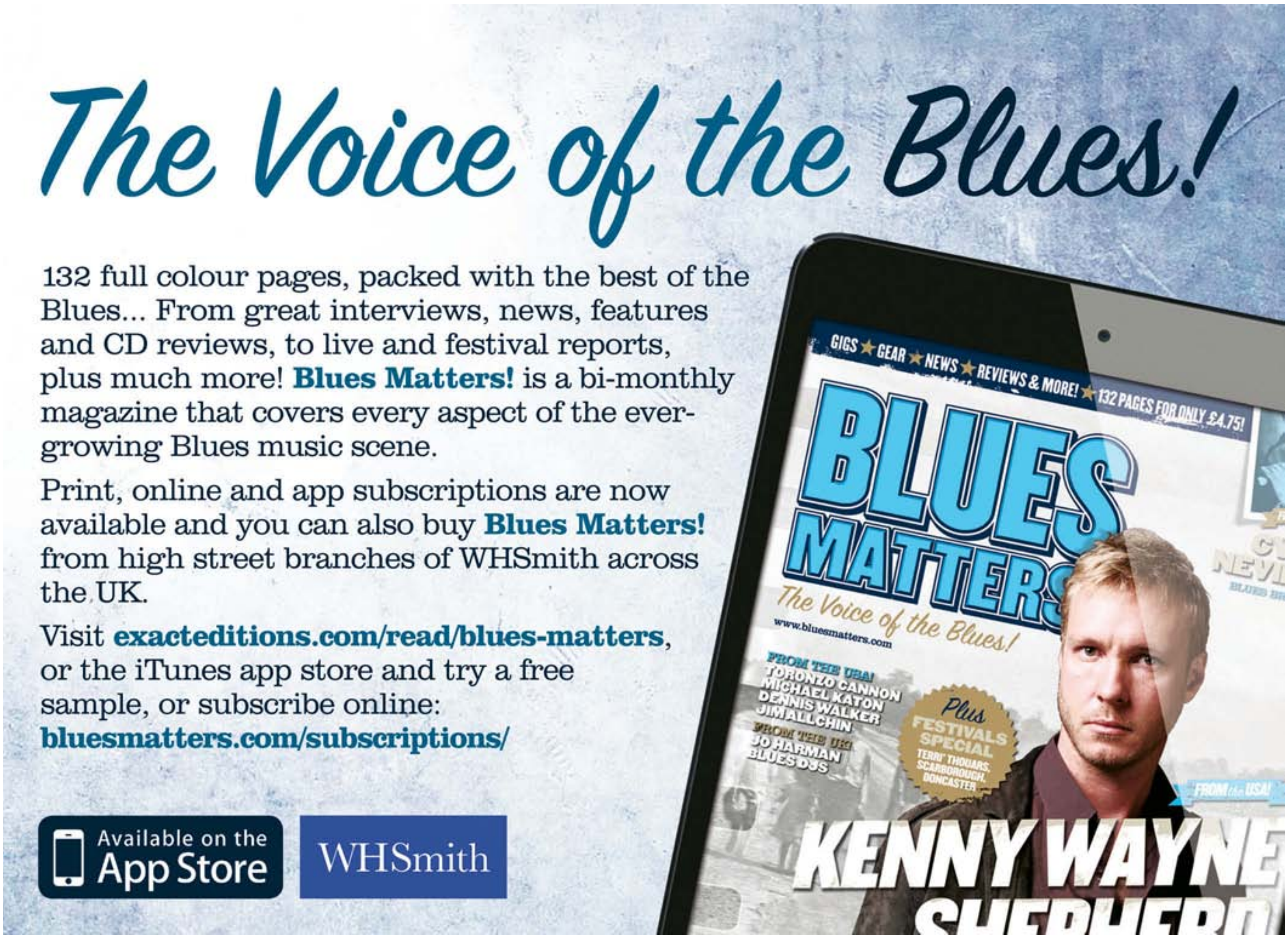
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13016 - Epiphone AJ220S Guitar, Vintage Sunburst
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9533 - Faith FM Mercury Parlour Guitar
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9184 - Lakewood D18 Dreadnought, Natural
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10230 - Seagull S6 Original
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10918 - Breedlove USA Gold D/SRE
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13216 - Faith Jupiter Jumbo, Secondhand
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13211 - Maestro Rosetta IR Dreadnought Electro
12792 - Maestro Rosetta MDT Dreadnought Electro
12596 - Maestro Rosetta with fitted LR Baggs
12793 - Maestro Rosetta MRDT Dreadnought Electro
12791 - Maestro Rosetta SR Dreadnought Electro
13212 - Maestro Singa Flame Maple Custom Electro
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13055 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
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8039 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Natural
12439 - Northwood Custom Koa 80D Electro
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series DN
11245 - Northwood M80-OM Electro Acoustic Guitar
4400 - Northwood R80, 000V Electro, Natural
6403 - Northwood R80, 0M Electro, Natural
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11246 - Northwood R80-OO Electro Acoustic Guitar
12472 - Ovation 6868 Elite Standardm Secondhand
12552 - Ovation Applause AE128 in Natural
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12534 - Ovation CC24S Electro Acoustic in Natural
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10038 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
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9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
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9196 - Java TUJ1 Concert Ukulele
9709 - Kahana Soprano Ukulele Inc Bag, in Black
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4465 - Ohana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
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RAYMOND BURLEY

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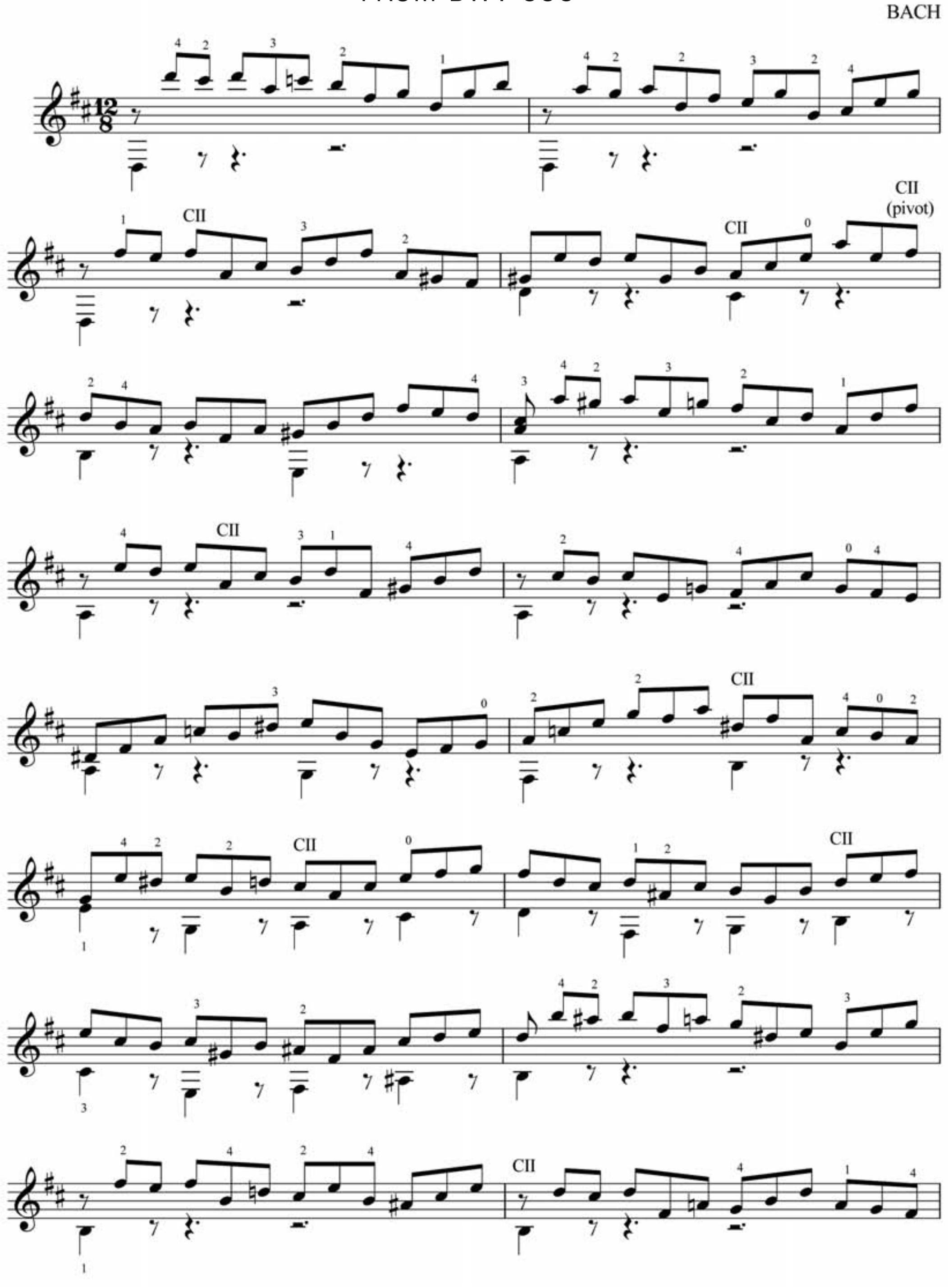
Raymond Burley is an accomplished classical guitarist, composer and arranger. One of his most recent projects was the album *Double Vision* – a collection of Giltrap pieces arranged for two guitars.
www.raymondburley.com

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

BACH PRELUDE

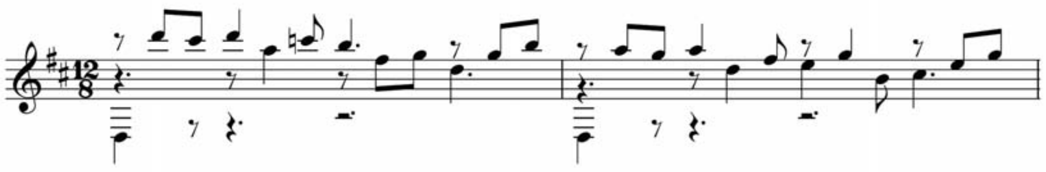
FROM BWV 998



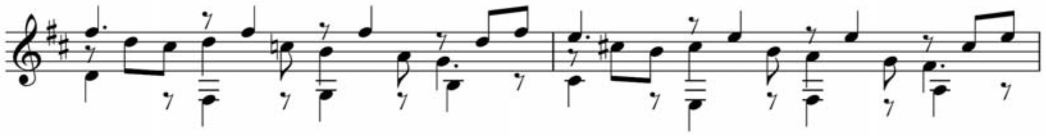
For this issue, I'm taking you back to J.S. Bach and I make no excuses for that. As I've said many times in articles and interviews: if I had to survive playing the music of just one composer I would choose Bach. Although he wrote nothing for guitar, his works for violin, cello and keyboard give us access to some of the finest music ever written. The piece this time is the opening movement of BWV 998: *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro* written originally for the lute. The *Prelude* is often extracted for performance on its own.

In common with many of Bach's instrumental works, what initially looks like a piece comprising a treble melody above a simple bass line is, in fact, a far more complex multi-layered composition. With

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



any new piece you should consider working out the phrasing before planning the fingerings. However, there are few pieces in the repertory where the fingering will dictate the phrasing more so than this one. Take the first few bars: with no fingering suggestions there will be several possibilities. You could even incorporate some left hand slurs – Segovia's edition of the *Prelude and Fugue* (published Schott, 1935) does that. If you scan through a music supplier's catalogue you'll find a good many editions of the work and it can be guaranteed they'll all be slightly different.

Look at **example 1**. You'll see that some of the notes have been extended beyond their original printed values. Using my fingering suggestions, you'll create an additional voice that, on paper, isn't there. So, not all the notes should be given the same degree of prominence. Later in the piece (bars 30-32) there is another "hidden" inside melody. **Example 2** shows this more clearly. The opening phrase of the piece is repeated throughout but in different keys: the dominant, the relative minor, etc. Each time there should be a similar approach. Of course, I'm not able to say this is what Bach intended, but the implied harmonies certainly suggest it.

As far as tempo is concerned, I would say a dotted crotchet speed of around 60 would seem appropriate; legato is more important than speed. Now, let's look at the technical points. Much of the piece is straightforward and contains little that will not have been encountered previously. The sixth string is lowered to D. Don't be frightened to use your right hand thumb for some of the inner bass notes – the third string, D, in the opening bar, for example. At the end of bar four, you'll see a direction of "CII" (pivot); this refers to a pivot or hinge barré. Instead of placing the left hand first finger across several strings, the extended first finger covers just the first string and then should be lowered to cover the required number of strings at the beginning of the following bar; a similar thing happens at the end of bar 24. I use this device quite frequently as an aid to legato. In bar 22, I have indicated a barré covering two frets simultaneously: III and IV - my term for this is a "diagonal barré". If you finger the required two notes in the conventional way: first finger on the upper G and second finger on the bass C sharp, you may well find the stretch to the following high B is impossible. By using the diagonal barré the movement is perfectly achievable. The device may feel odd until you are used to it but I can think of several pieces where this unorthodox technique will be beneficial to you.

The entire piece grows out of a simple repeated three note cell; this is illustrated effectively in bars 38 and 39. The quaver flow is interrupted briefly by a dominant seventh chord at the beginning of bar 40 and, following its resolution, semiquaver embellishment and recapitulation, continues through to the end. Notice how the repeated pedal D bass notes at bar 42 suggest an aural winding-down. Through the entire piece you may consider leaving the bass notes to sustain for longer than their written lengths in the sheet music. Certainly it would be difficult to damp these on a 13 course lute.

As far as dynamic contrasts are concerned, I would suggest experimenting; Bach offered no suggestions. I tend to change my mind about most things concerning baroque music: dynamics, fingerings, tempo, ornamentation, etc. each time I return to it.

I hope you enjoy the piece as much as I have over the years. You may well find it stays with you long after other pieces have faded.

Raymond Burley

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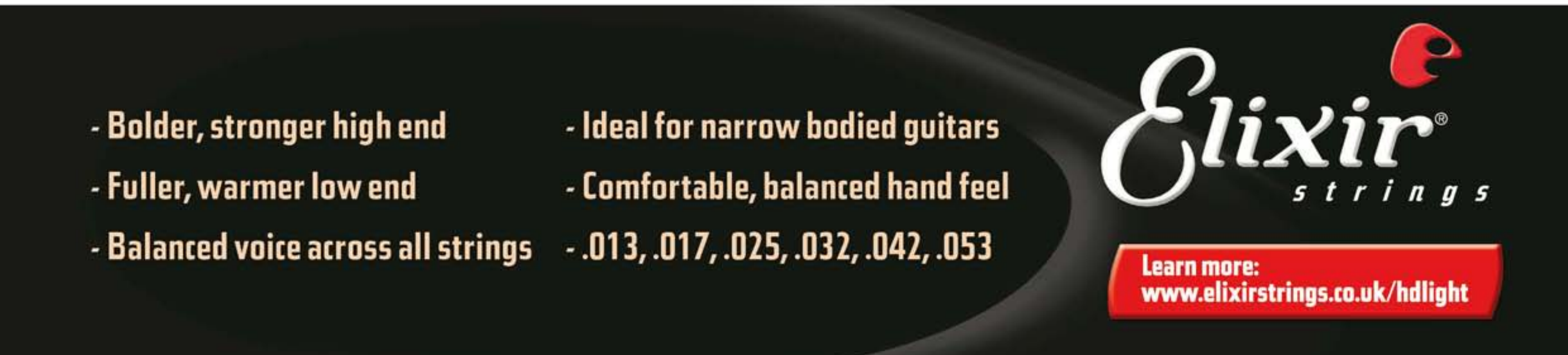


MIKE DAWES

Fingerstyle Virtuoso

Mike Dawes is an acclaimed globetrotter and wizard impersonator working with the Candyrat label. His solo work has seen him perform in all corners of the world and his studio CV includes sessions with the likes of Gotye and Newton Faulkner. He is also the right-hand axe man to Justin Hayward of the Moody Blues and is usually sat in some airport writing for the us here at *Acoustic* magazine.

www.mikedawes.com

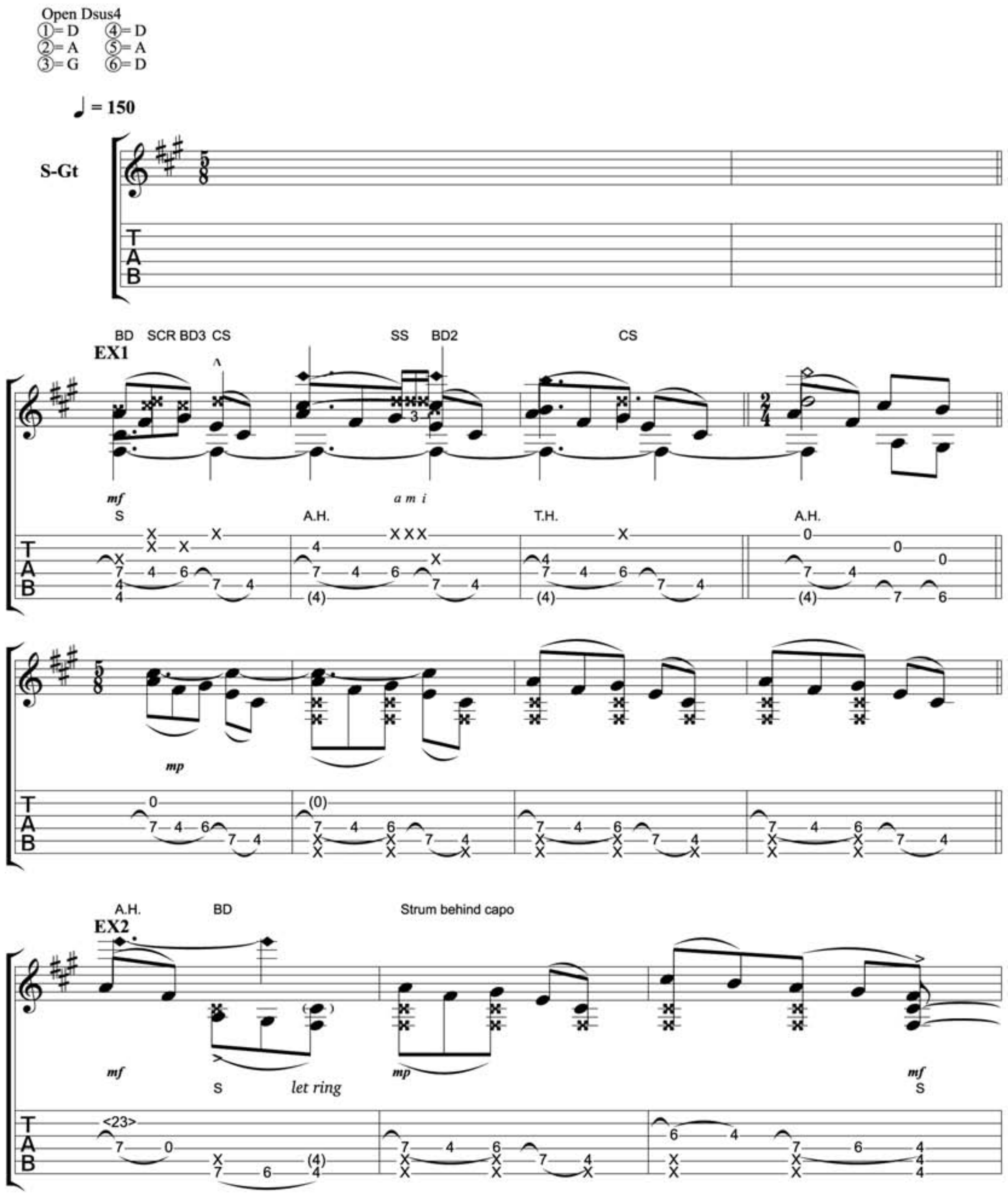
TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

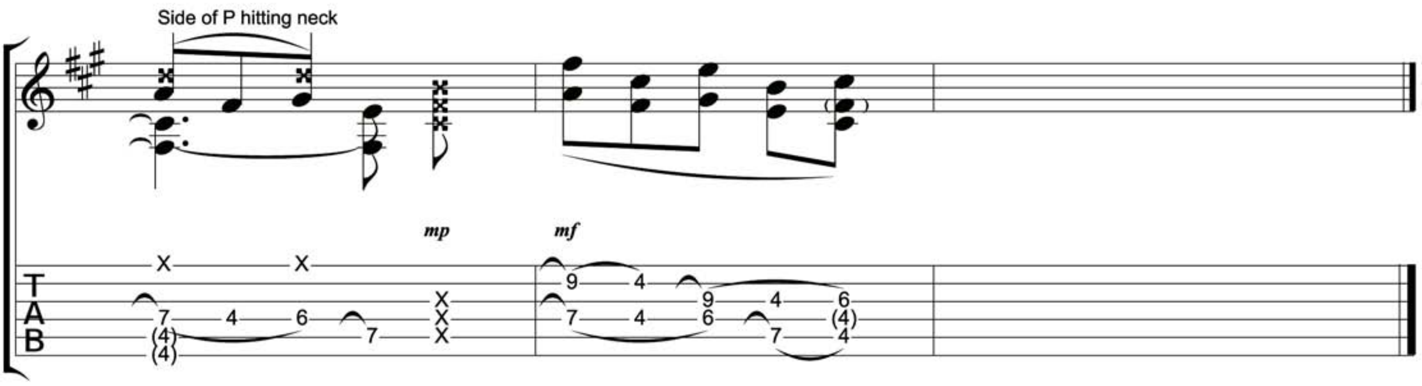
THE IMPOSSIBLE

PART 2

Last time, I introduced you to the layered introduction of my original track 'The Impossible'. In this article, we will continue by looking at the first verse of the song. The song itself is full of variations and upon first listen it may be hard to define an accessible structure. The term "verse" is used here in less a traditional sense, and more to help with the categorisation of the sections in a digestible format. Once again, we are in DADGAD tuning with a partial capo on fret four, strings two through six. Please use the official video as a reference which can be found in the digital edition. Remember, because we have a partial capo, "four" on all but the top string is the same as "open" in this tab.

THE IMPOSSIBLE – MIKE DAWES





EXAMPLE 1

In this extract, we are introduced to the single stave method of percussive guitar notation, where the drum instructions are illustrated in text above the notation. The key for understanding these instructions (in order of appearance) is as follows:

BD: Bass drum – heel of picking hand strikes top above sound hole
SCR: Scratch – fingernails scrape top of guitar, near cutaway area
BD3: Bass drum three – heel of picking hand strikes top above cutaway area
CS: Cutaway snare – strike the side of the guitar at the cutaway area (or where the cutaway would be if you don't have one)
SS: Side snare – strike the lower right side of the guitar (imagine where the input socket on a Les Paul would be)
BD2: Bass drum two – heel of picking hand strikes top on lower right side

The annotations above the tablature itself, in order of appearance, are as follows:

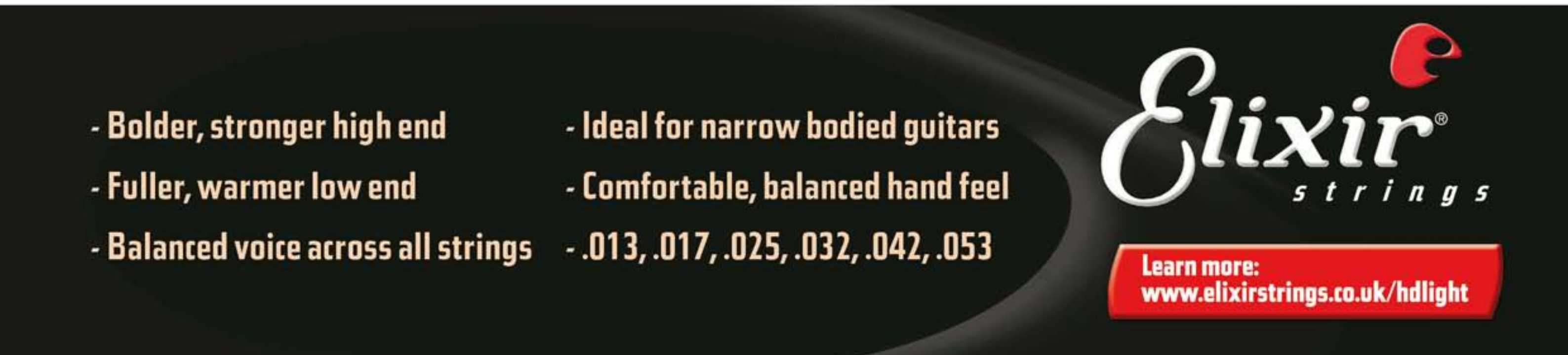
S: Slap
A.H.: Artificial harmonic
T.H.: Tapped harmonic

This segment (above and left) is performed using a repeated 5/8 hammered pattern while the picking hand performs percussive flourishes and various harmonics. Don't miss the sneaky bar of 2/4! I must also mention that the artificial (one handed) harmonics are picked 12 frets higher than the tabbed note (four=16, 0=12).

EXAMPLE 2

Before **example 2** you'll be repeating bars one through three of **example 1**. In the interest of saving space, I haven't included this. **Example 2** uses similar techniques and approaches, but introduces new ideas, such as "beyond the fretboard harmonics" using the side of 'P' (pulgar: thumb) to hit the side of the neck and strumming behind the capo to create a confusing, mechanical sound.

Best of luck with this first verse; next time, we'll be looking at the pre-chorus and chorus.
Mike Dawes



CHRIS GIBBONS
Composer

Chris is not only a guitar teacher but also a composer and producer who has worked on many orchestrations for television and recordings alike. He has many years of experience both in performance and helping others develop their playing potential to its best.
www.chrisgibbonsmusic.co.uk

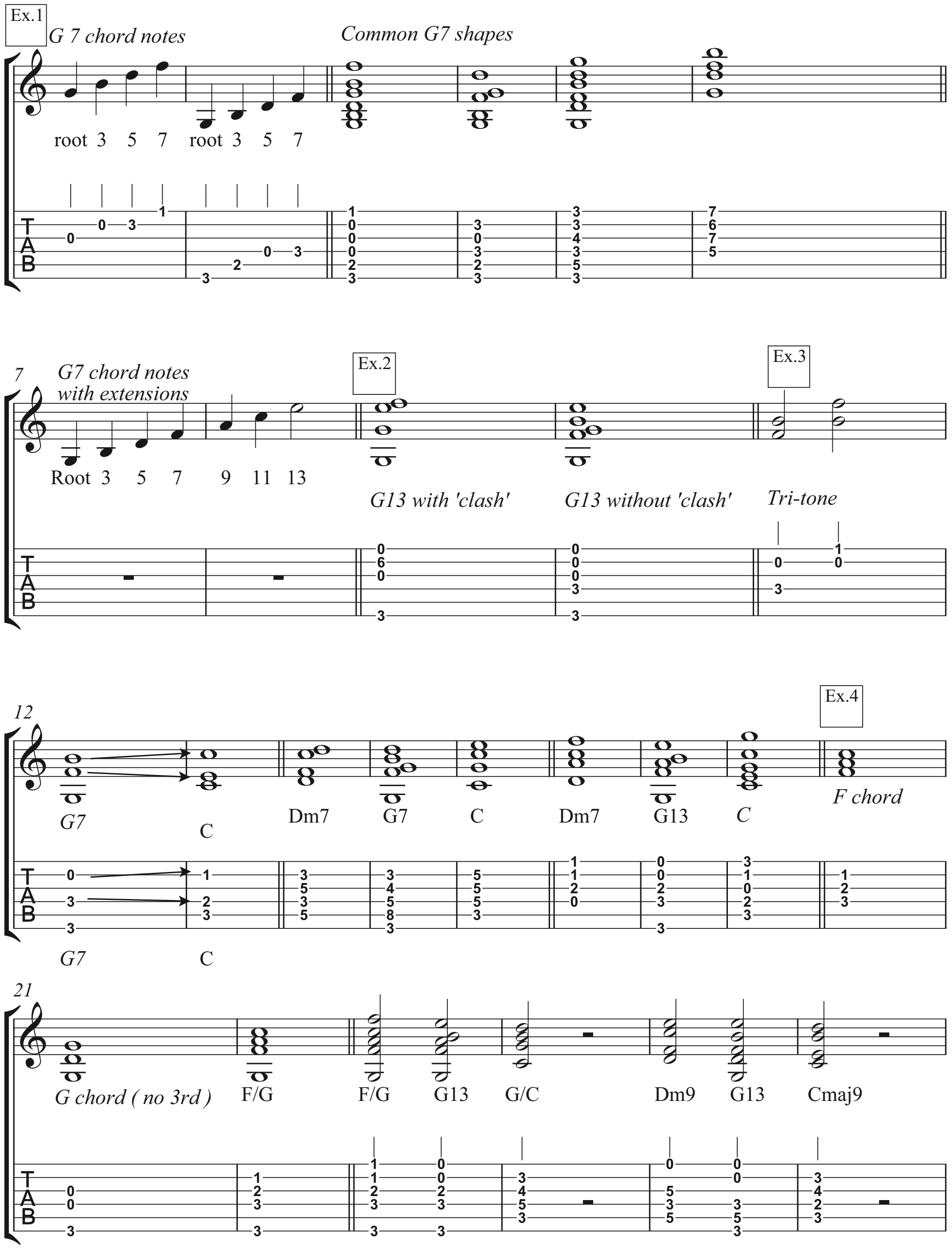
TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

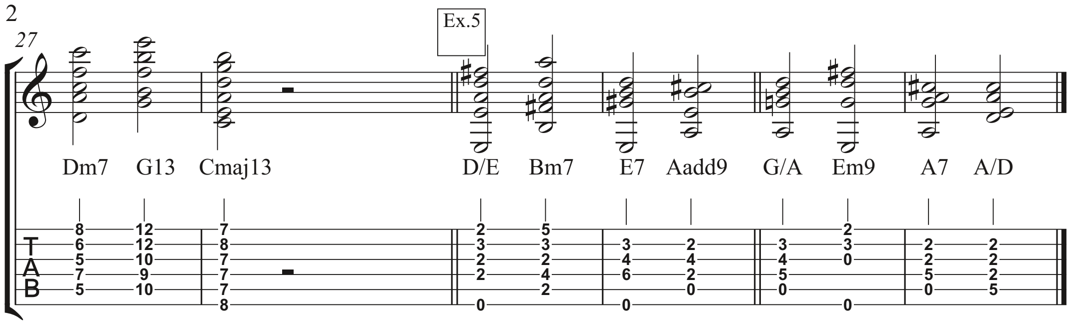
STACKED CHORDS: DOMINANTS

PART 1: THE BASICS

I have spent many years working as an arranger and orchestrator for a wide range of ensembles, from bands needing horn or string charts right up to a full symphonic ensemble. In this context, complex chords can be distributed between the various sections of the orchestra to yield a variety of effects.

When dealing with chords with a number of added notes or extensions, one can place notes next to one another in a cluster or use open voicings that separate the tones into different registers. When combining notes in a cluster, the arranger seeks to keep consonant voicings within one instrument section, thus making them easier to "hear". I'll give you an example and then tell you why this principle is important for a guitarist! Take a look at the following tablature.





EXAMPLE 1

Take the chord of G7. This consists of the root, G; third B, fifth D and seventh F. Now let us add two extensions to this chord, the ninth (A) and thirteenth (E).

EXAMPLE 2

With a clean sheet of paper to work on, the arranger can place the E and F together, a tense semi-tone clash; play F on the sixth fret of the second string and the open E and G strings. If you can make the stretch, play a low G on the third fret of the sixth string which provides the root of the chord. Now play G third fret, sixth string; F third fret, fourth string; and open G, B and E strings (third, second and first). We can call this clash a dissonant voicing.

The clash between the E and F is resolved by placing the F one octave lower.

So the arranger has a choice; for example, using a five-piece brass section, say three trumpets and two trombones, the trombones can play a rather robust seventh interval (the lower two notes of the G13 guitar chord in the example), the low G and F above, leaving the trumpets to voice the chord G, B and E (the upper open strings of the G13 guitar chord). With the clash removed we can call this a more consonant voicing.

It is part of the composer's art to select dissonant or consonant voicings to define the character of a section of music.

Although the E is the thirteenth of the G dominant chord, the G, B, and E combination you will recognise as a plain and simple E minor chord. Now, I realise to many of you this may seem a bit obscure and complex, but the guitar is an instrument with limitations. It only has six strings and you rarely play more than four or five at once in most chords.

So, clearly, you need to make intelligent choices of which notes to use, and which to omit when dealing with compositions where extended chords are used, or where you want to devise more sophisticated solo lines over a basic chord sequence.

EXAMPLE 3

Now the dominant chord has a very important function in any song, arrangement or chord progression. It is the only chord that contains a tri-tone.

A tri-tone is an interval or three whole tones. In classical music, it was known as "The Devil's Interval" and has a most disturbing effect, but it is this unsettling effect that is required to bring the composition to a state of tension before its final release and resolution back to the home key.

We were using the example of the chord G7; this is the dominant of the key of C.

The tri-tone in the G7 chord is the interval from F to B.

The F needs to fall down to E and the B rise to C to bring relief to the anxiety of the tri-tone. To support this movement, the root of the dominant chord G moves soundly to the root of C with a nice emphatic thud and the job is done. Have a look at the examples to see how the voices lead from tension to release in a G7 to C chord. I've marked this movement with arrows.

So we now should grasp an understanding of the movement here, and thereby indulge ourselves with a little enhancement of the sequence to prolong the suspense at the end. There is a very simple way to do this, and that is achieved by inserting one more chord before the dominant that is very similar. In this case we use the chord of Dm7. The Dm7 chord contains both the D and F of the G7 chord, but has an A in place of the G and a C in place of the B.

When the three chords of Dm7/G7 and C are placed in a progression, you can see how easily the notes flow from one to another. On the guitar you may play these chords using shapes that conceal this movement, but using compatible shapes for the transition to be played smoothly.

EXAMPLE 4

It is perfectly acceptable to use a D minor run over a G7 chord, and using the relative major of D minor (which is F major) it can be clearly seen that the 'stacked chord' of F superimposed on G implies that movement from G7 toward C.

Play the examples given of combinations of F/G, Dm7 and G7 chords moving homeward toward C major and pay attention to the enhanced emotional effect and elegance of voice when using this principle. In addition to a simple C major chord, we can also resolve to an enhanced C major chord or one of the stacked major chords covered in the previous issues.

EXAMPLE 5

One can easily move this principle to other keys, especially where an open string can be used for the bass notes: D/E, Bm7, E7 to A, G/A, Em7, A7 to D, for example. Have fun exploring these tonalities and in the next issue I'll show you how to build up these patterns and soloing melody lines based on stacked chords, and some tips on using a looping pedal as a practice aid.

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TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

KNOW FEAR

KICKING THAT DREADED STAGE FRIGHT

It seems that I always start my articles with a concept, followed by a collection of notes and thoughts, and then finally get the nerve to write what could be nothing more than utter nonsense. However, I have given my current topic plenty of thought, have had my own experience in this matter and, as usual, have enough things to say that might make some folks want to shut me up with a staple gun. But this is something worth addressing as it has been coming up lately in the teaching portion of my life – tackling the ever elusive concept of stage fright or performance fear. Once again, in my delusions of grandeur, I believe I have gotten to the bottom of it all. Here, steadfast readers, you can insert a "ha ha".

When talking about performance fear, it doesn't simply apply to playing the guitar in front of an audience – there's so much more that you can apply it to. You can add to it reading aloud in public, applying for a job, talking on the phone, attending a party, asking someone out for a date – or staring in the mirror and trying to take yourself seriously.

I've heard the theory before that playing an instrument for 10,000 hours makes an expert, but I've always had trouble with that since I don't quite know how to measure so many contributing factors. Who is your teacher? How old were you when you started? What quality instrument did you begin with? And the ones that seem totally immeasurable – how much does your brain work on *it*, whatever it is, when you're asleep along with during the day how often and intensely does your mind focus on *it*?

I'm convinced that it is immeasurable but I do know that when I've run my mind over a piece, locked it into my mental sights and effectively employed the art of visualisation, I have been able to play a piece measurably better due to my efforts.

So how does this tie into conquering fear? The answer is preparation. There are multiple aspects to consider in preparing for what is about to be presented when attempting to beat this obstacle of turning into stone in public.

You don't need Medusa to pull this off, just taming your pointlessly self-inflicted ego that has been written and studied by individuals far, far above my pay grade. "Did they like me?" "Did I do OK?" "I should've done this." "I usually play better than that." "Was I looking up too much?" "Was I on key, in tune, how was the sound, how was my hair, how, how did I..." Whether

or not an audience is rooting for you, it is always going to be an aspect of your fragility that will send you into a deep freeze faster than a Marvel Comics bad guy.

I recall a brilliant performer who said to me that ideally, when everything is right and all the planets line up, it is almost as if everything dissolves around you and the audience and the performer fade into the background and the only thing left in the room is the music. That is when the player and audience stand witness to the beauty of the content. It is as if the player is merely a conduit for the music to travel through and his job is to get out of the way and service the music.

Then how do we get to this spot to handle fear? Get to the woodshed to prepare and know when it's time to visit the playground. The woodshedding part of your life, in this case your instrument, must be attended to, and that will include all the basic requirements. Being in tune, establishing multiple solid rhythms and grooves, understanding your musical menu of options regardless of whether they are acquired from instinct or through education, exploring a number of styles and musical cultures, creating music, listening to music beyond your instrument of choice, playing a lot... the list goes on.

Another thing is to realise that you can't do it all. I once asked a pulmonologist if it bothered him that he is not a dentist and in all likelihood may never be a dentist. He looked at me like I was nuts, then nodded "No" while thumping on my chest.

This type of question was the outcome of the realisation of how insecure I was about not knowing how to do so many things on the guitar and how much it bothered me. I can't play with a flat-pick – they just fall in the hole. I've never been in a band because I have stated that I never wanted to hear their problems or share my money. But the drawback was that I didn't gain the experience of playing with other people, which is an avenue to definitely put as a high priority in the development as a player. I've been told by many phenomenal players that playing with others in the long run will kick any metronome's ass, although I'm not sure where the metronome's ass is, but I have a sneaking suspicion it's the battery.

In asking this lung doctor why he doesn't do teeth, his perplexed and dismissive response was exactly what I needed. It doesn't matter. I do what I do and this is what I do. It's that simple. I learned right then to accept what I do and embrace it and be comfortable knowing that I can't and probably wouldn't want to be able to do it all.

Speaking of lungs, here are some of my closing thoughts on quashing fear.

Before walking onto the the stage, and blasting out your rendition of 'House of the Rising Sun' or 'Stairway to Heaven', do your work. And work hard, work strategically, and enjoy the process and the journey – and the challenges. It's about the attitude you take.

When I was a kid playing with Play-Doh, the thought never crossed my mind about how good anybody else was with Play-Doh, who had what colors or if they had more than me... I was just busy making my own mess and having fun. My breathing was steady and my masterpiece dino-flop-a-noodle-muck was on the way to existing – by my own hands.

During your woodshedding, check your eyes, ears, feet, and lungs. Use a metronome and *look* at the numbers clicking for timing, look at your hands playing the music, close your eyes and *look* into your mind at the music that you're playing.

Then use your ears. *Listen* for the intervals, check the tuning, *listen* to the metronome and of course, *listen* to the music you're creating.

Watch your feet tapping and realise that, amazingly, they may have nothing to do with the timing of what you're actually playing. How about that? It might just be a nervous twitch! Don't fall for it because your foot might be tapping away at its own rate.

A big one for me is to always consider my lungs. When I play, am I breathing correctly? Often when working with students I've asked them if they recognise whether or not they are holding their breath while playing and too often the thought never crossed their minds. Understanding the importance of the breath is crucial to the fluidity of the music because it's one of the potential obstacles to impede the producer of the tune.

I'm convinced that if performing is something you're genuinely after, looking at yourself and conducting an extensive study of the ego and doing your extended and dedicated hard work both with and without guidance are crucial to overcoming your performance fears.

Experience does matter too, so get out there and be willing to fall down a few times – or a few hundred. Have someone audio and video tape your performance and study them like a sports reviewer studying game films. Learn from them. Develop a routine, a repertoire – cover all possible bases.

One thing you can't rush is time. The years add up to take their own special toll as you change as a person. Be patient and enjoy the ride. Don't beat yourself up to much. I believe this is how it works.

Over time with some work, playing in front of an audience (or speaking) should be like riding a bicycle – effortless, because you prepared and practiced. If someone asked you if you were nervous about riding your bike in front of your pals, it would be an utterly preposterous question because it would be so second nature and as I said, effortless. So get to work. Know fear and whip it. There's no crying in guitar playing, right?

I'll be playing tours in New Zealand, Australia, Ireland and UK: August 30 – October 5. Check ***www.richardgilewitz.com*** for the full tour schedule.

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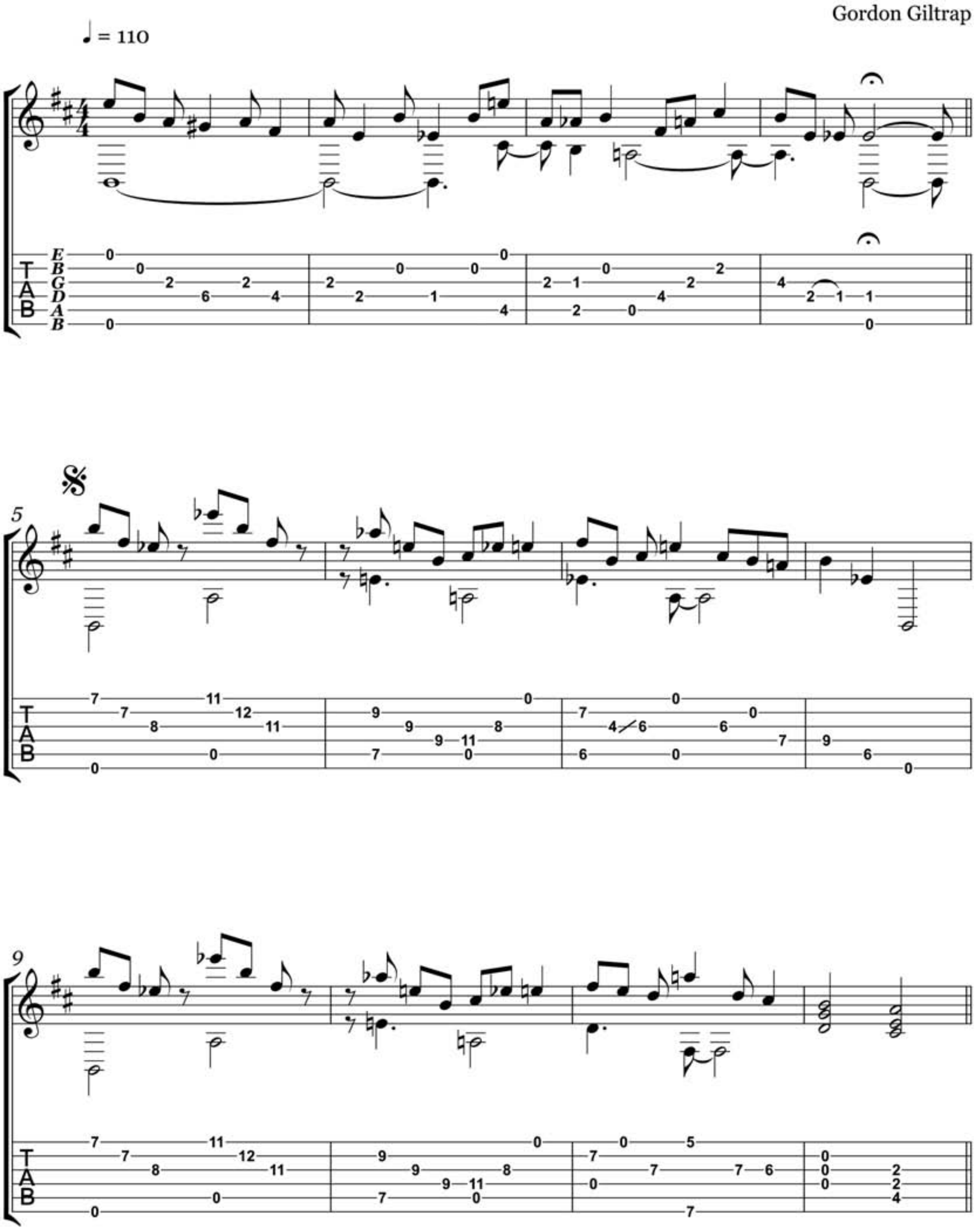
TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

RAVENSBOURN

SOME FINGER STRETCHING THIS MONTH WITH A PIECE FROM GORDON'S *DOUBLE VISION*



This month's piece 'Ravensbourn' was composed in 2002, and is a prime example of how retuning one string can alter one's complete approach to composition. In this case it is the low B on the sixth string (low E) putting the piece in (surprisingly) the key of B! It first appeared on the *Double Vision* album with my fellow columnist and good friend Raymond Burley.

First of all, let us look at the first bar which has a fairly long stretch from the second fret on the third string (A) to the fourth string sixth fret (G#). If you're not used to such long stretches, I suggest you spend time easing into it slowly and gently.

Next is in bars six and 10; this stretch is fairly high up the fingerboard and can be a tad cramped in that position. The following is an alternative

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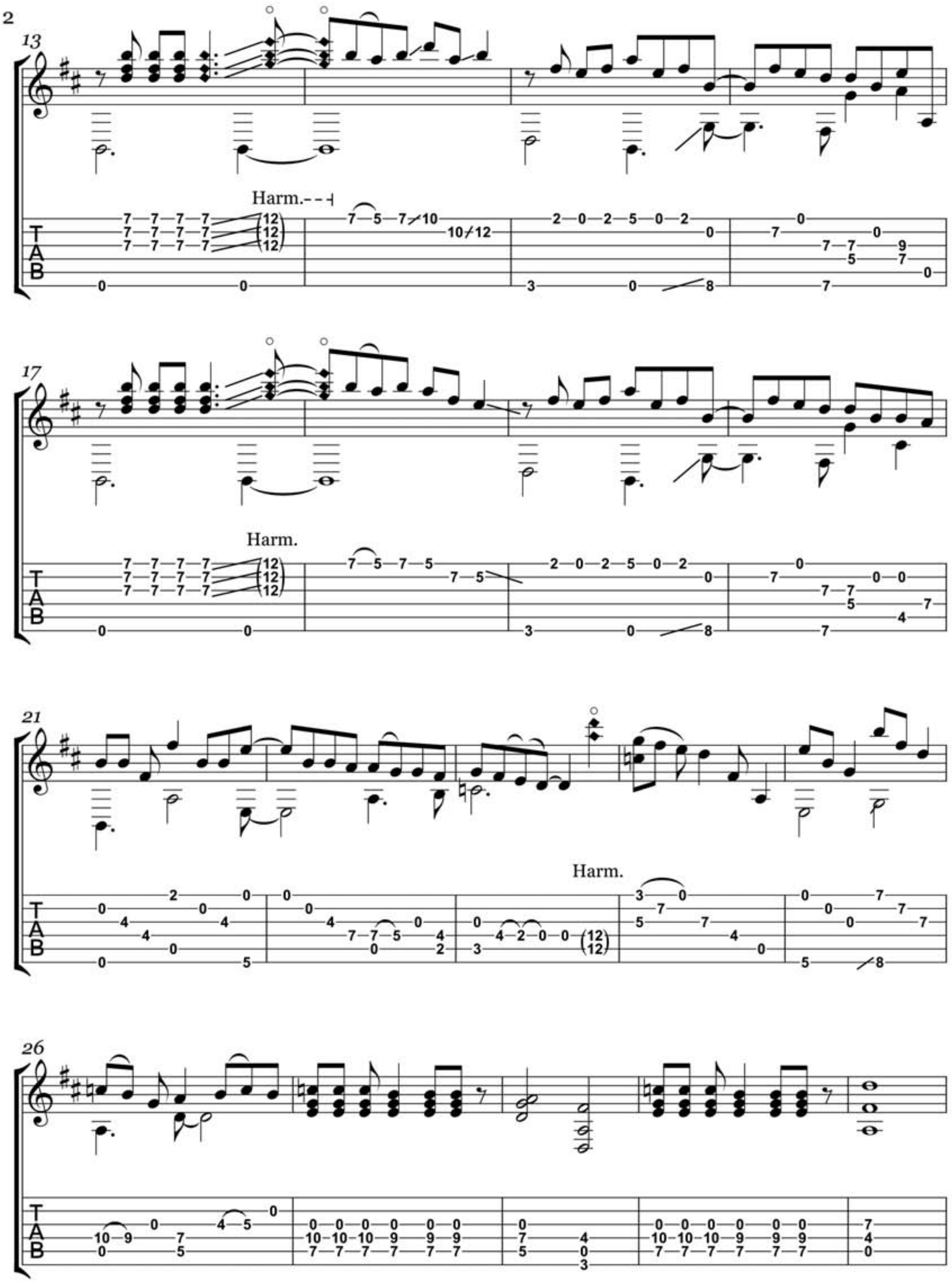
fingering which is as follows: ninth fret second string, and seventh fret fifth string played together, then an open first string followed by an open second string, followed by sixth fret third string played together with an open fifth string, and then followed by fourth fret second string and then an open first string.

I know this may sound confusing, but it does make perfect sense and saves having extra tablature at this point. But, most of all, you do what you feel most comfortable with.

Moving swiftly on, let's look at bar 24 which requires all three fingers to be placed on the fingerboard at this point to smoothly play the pull-off from the third fret to an open first string after the seventh fret second string. This is followed by the fourth finger moving across to play the seventh fret third string, followed by fourth fret fourth string, and then the open fifth string. Apart from it being, once again, a pretty long stretch, you must try and get all three fingers into play here. For me, this is probably the most challenging section in the tune thus far, but I hope I'm wrong and you find it a breeze to play!

The penultimate bar (bar 60) also presents a bit of a challenge, but all will be revealed when you get there. 'Ravensbourn' is a river that runs through the part of Deptford where I grew up, and holds fond memories of my childhood. My thanks go to Mark Thomson for transcribing the piece.

Gordon Giltrap



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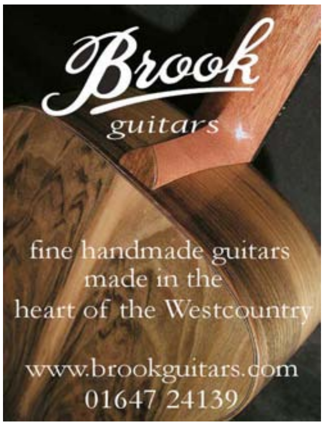

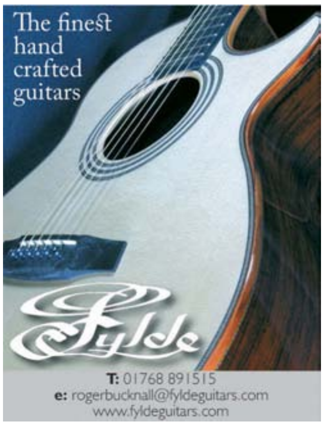

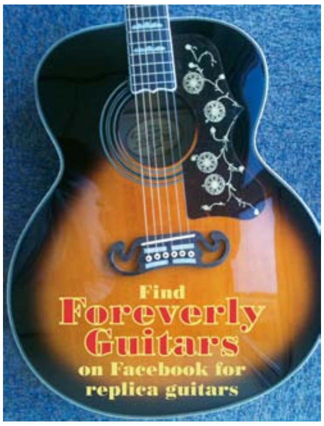

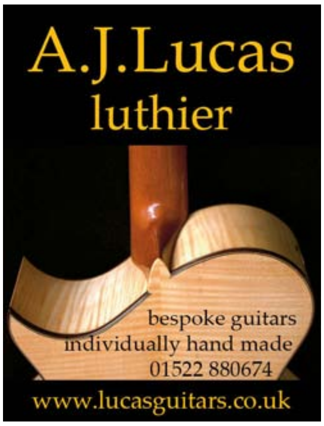

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LEGENDS

Neil Young

WORDS: TERI SACCONE

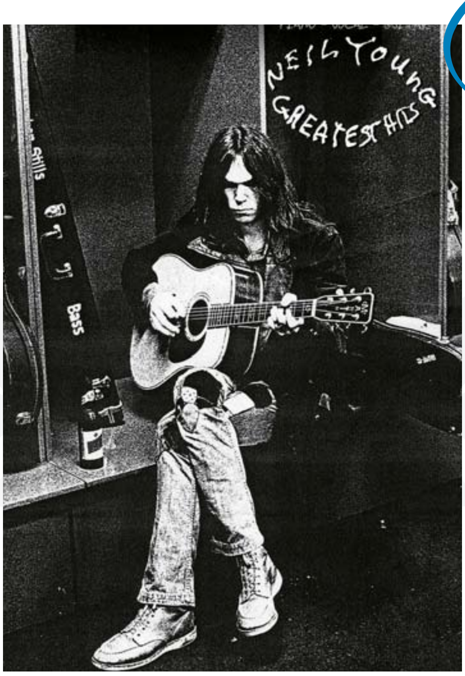
Neil Young is unquestionably one of the most gifted and prolific singer-songwriters of his generation. While known for wielding an electric guitar with biblical intensity, it's Young's acoustic prowess that Legends celebrates.

Young has long driven a mallet through the complex heart of being human, vulnerable, and aware – an intensity that resonates throughout his acoustic balladry. That his non-electric canon stands shoulder-to-shoulder with electric behemoths – 'Cortez the Killer', 'Hey Hey My My (Into the Black)', and 'Cinnamon Girl' among them – speaks to the strength of his acoustic artistry.

Whether it's the windswept despair of 'Don't Let It Bring You Down' or the poignancy of 'Old Man', there is one constant in Young's acoustic output: an omnipresence of deep reflection in where lyrics and melodies commune seamlessly. These classic acoustic tracks exemplify his deft chord changes and memorable guitar work; his uniquely nasal voice perpetually maintains an urgent longing, underscoring the emotion.

Some might argue that his acoustic playing is even more potent than his electrified presence as it is raw, unfettered, and pure. Consider 'Helpless', or 'Ambulance Blues' – a nine-minute acoustic ballad that examines the way time changes everything.

'Are You Ready For The Country?' is one of the standout tracks from the abundant *Harvest*, proving his ability to create country-rock classics with relative ease. Echoing that country vibe decades later came the infectious *Harvest Moon*. It certainly rates as Young's best acoustic work from the 1990s. Young's acoustic technique is a significant contribution to these classics, often delivered with his



mainstay Martin D-18 (and a penchant for dropped D tuning).

Besides the guitar, his acoustic output can be heard as he accompanies himself on different instruments – including piano and harmonica – proving visceral in Young's capable hands.

Born in Toronto, Canada, in 1945, Neil Young cut his teeth with local garage rock band the Squires and as a solo folk act in the clubs of Toronto in the early 1960s. He moved southward to Los Angeles around the middle of the decade in his old black Pontiac hearse. His first brush with fame was as a founding member (along with Stephen Stills) of Buffalo Springfield. The band had almost instant success as forerunners of the California folk-rock movement and their classic anti-establishment hit 'For What It's Worth'. The band imploded soon after due in part to the battling egos of Stills and Young. Neil quit and re-joined the band a few times before leaving permanently in 1968. That's when Young first focused his attentions entirely on his solo work for a time.

His eponymously titled first album was released in early 1969 and included more of the country-folk vibe he explored with Buffalo Springfield, as well as various instrumental music provided by Neil himself. His long-term band Crazy Horse supported Young's second album *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*. Following the completion of the record, he began jamming with Crosby, Stills & Nash, eventually joining the group for their spring 1970 album, *Déjà Vu*. While the band evolved to the point of being known as Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Young continued to record as a solo artist, releasing *After the Gold Rush* in the summer of 1970 with its accompanying single 'Only Love Can Break Your Heart'. This established Young as a solo star, with his fame only amplified through the association with CSNY. Over the ensuing decade, Young's star as a solo act ascended further via the half acoustic, half electric *Rust Never Sleeps*.

Although Young experimented stylistically during the 1980s, incorporating rockabilly and electronic music, and has dipped in and out of CSNY along the way, it is his solo work as an acoustic player that proves to be timeless.

If you've not witnessed Young live minus Crazy Horse in the exhilarating acoustic realm, a good reference point would be the classic album *Live At Massey Hall 1971*.

Besides his gargantuan contributions to music, Young has spent his life championing health-related issues, has battled serious medical issues himself, and has not withered with regard to his musical output. Now, in his late 60s, his live shows are as powerful as ever. He continues to rock as hard as ever. Long may you run, Neil.

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